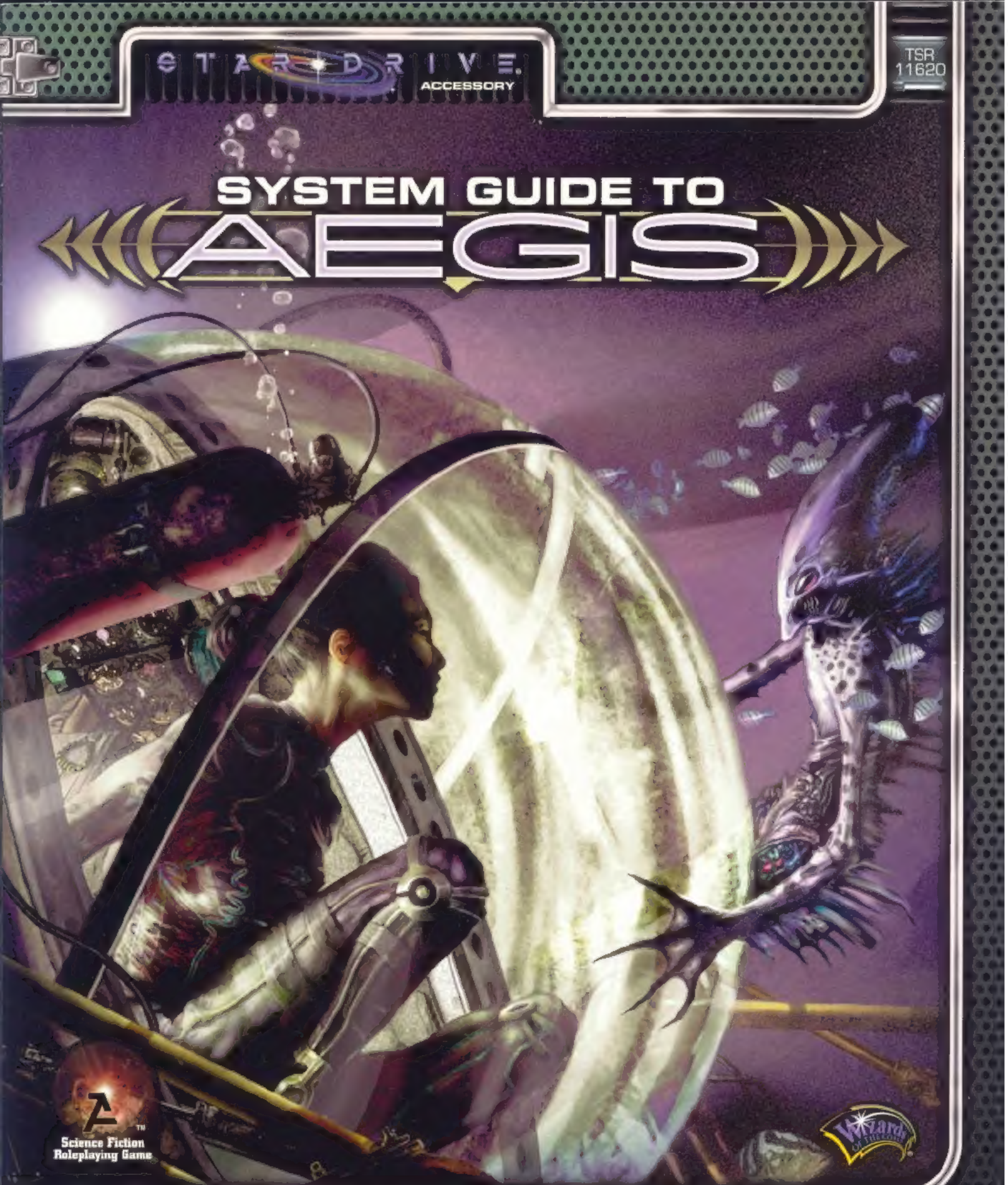
STAR DRIVE ACCESSORY

TSR 11620

SYSTEM GUIDE TO AEGIS



Science Fiction Roleplaying Game

William W. Connors and Steven Schend

STAR DRIVE

SYSTEM GUIDE TO AEGIS

by William W. Connors and Steven Schend

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Science Fiction Roleplaying Game

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Introduction

Welcome to Aegis! Called the Jewel of the Verge or the Eye of the Storm, depending on whom you listen to, the Aegis system offers even veteran travelers a place to hang their shingle for a while. Who knows? Maybe you'll even find a home here!

Players and Gamemasters alike can use the information in this sourcebook to center an entire campaign around Bluefall and the rest of the Aegis system or simply use those elements they find useful in a more wide-ranging campaign.

The Aegis system represents a focal point for efforts by stellar nations to control the destiny of the Verge. Forbidden by treaty to fight, the stellar nations nevertheless continue to seek mastery in the games of one-upmanship that have plagued them for decades. The Concord enforces that uneasy peace back in the Stellar Ring. In the Verge, however, it is concerned with a more immediate threat: the Externals. That leaves the stellar nations more latitude than the Concord would like, something the nations use to their advantage all over the Verge. Nowhere, though, is this opportunism more prevalent than in the Aegis system.

What's Inside This Book

There's a lot of information here. Taken as a whole, it provides a broad overview of the system and its inhabitants. In various locations throughout the text, sidebars provide additional information that players and Gamemasters might find interesting and useful to their campaigns. How do people get around on Bluefall? What's up with the new Aegis Grid?

There's an in-depth look at the events that have shaped life in the Bluefall system. Presented as a timeline, this information can be easily referenced and, when read from start to finish, allows the Gamemaster to see how both momentous and trivial events intertwined to make the Regency of Bluefall what it is today.

There's also a detailed survey of the Aegis system, full of facts and figures for those who like to know how everything fits together. This is followed by a more detailed look at Bluefall itself, as well as its government. As well, there are answers to some of the riddles of the system: Who are the deepfallen? What caused the Vanishing?

A chapter on geography provides information of the great seas of Bluefall and lists the islands and who owns them. Included is a brief description of each island.

Also included in this sourcebook is information on water vehicles and other gear that Bluefall natives rely upon.

While all of the above information provides the reader with a good understanding of what he's likely to encounter in the Aegis system, another section of this book examines how the people of Bluefall think and what it means to be a citizen of the Regency. In addition, they'll learn what the other major players in the system are doing. Just what are the plans for the Thuldan Empire's Lhop fortress or VoidCorp's Redcrown gas mine? Even the Regency can't say for certain.

Finally, a short final chapter adds a few new career options for players who want to play Regency heroes.

What's Not Included

A great deal of information has already been printed about the Aegis system in general and the planet Bluefall in particular. Every effort has been made to avoid reprinting such material in this book unless its inclusion plays an important role in enhancing the reader's understanding of the Aegis system. In most cases, for example, the information presented in the Star*Drive campaign book is assumed to be unchanged and, thus, not reprinted here. In cases where a major event has altered that information, updated material is presented here.

In some cases, it would be unwise to follow this guideline. The *System Survey* chapter, for example, includes many of the facts and figures about the astrophysical make-up of the Aegis system. Much of this was already presented in the Star*Drive campaign book. In this volume, that information is reprinted and then expanded upon to a great degree.

In other words, this book is intended to complement the material presented elsewhere, not to replace it.

Time of Publication

The material presented in this book represents conditions in the Verge as they stand in **January, 2503**. In all cases, players and Gamemasters should assume the text supersedes products such as the Star*Drive campaign book and *Alien Compendium*, which have earlier dates of publication.

Additional Materials

We assume that readers of this book own or have access to a copy of the Alternity game system, the Star*Drive Campaign Setting, and the *Alien Compendium: Creatures of the Verge*. Readers of this book may find a copy of *Threats From Beyond* and *Outbound: An Explorer's Handbook* useful as well.

Chapter One: Timeline

The timeline that follows organizes Aegis' history in a concise form that allows players and Gamemasters to review it quickly.

Gamemasters are encouraged to use the events mentioned here as springboards for adventures or hero creation. When creating a hero who is from Aegis, for example, the Gamemaster or player could pull one of these events from the timeline that might work well as a significant event in the hero's past (or that of a family member). Is this hero one of the original colonists who happened to be off-planet when the Vanishing occurred? Did this hero follow Christopher Hale when he led the cadets of the Ericis military academy on their flight across hundreds of light-years of space? By creating these sorts of ties, a player can do a great deal to make his hero an integral part of the campaign.

The Gamemaster can also use these events to create adventures. Perhaps a recurring enemy was a former companion during the mass exodus of Orion natives from Old Space. Indeed, a brother or sister who was left behind might seek revenge for this real or imagined abandonment. The possibilities are limitless.

History of the Aegis System

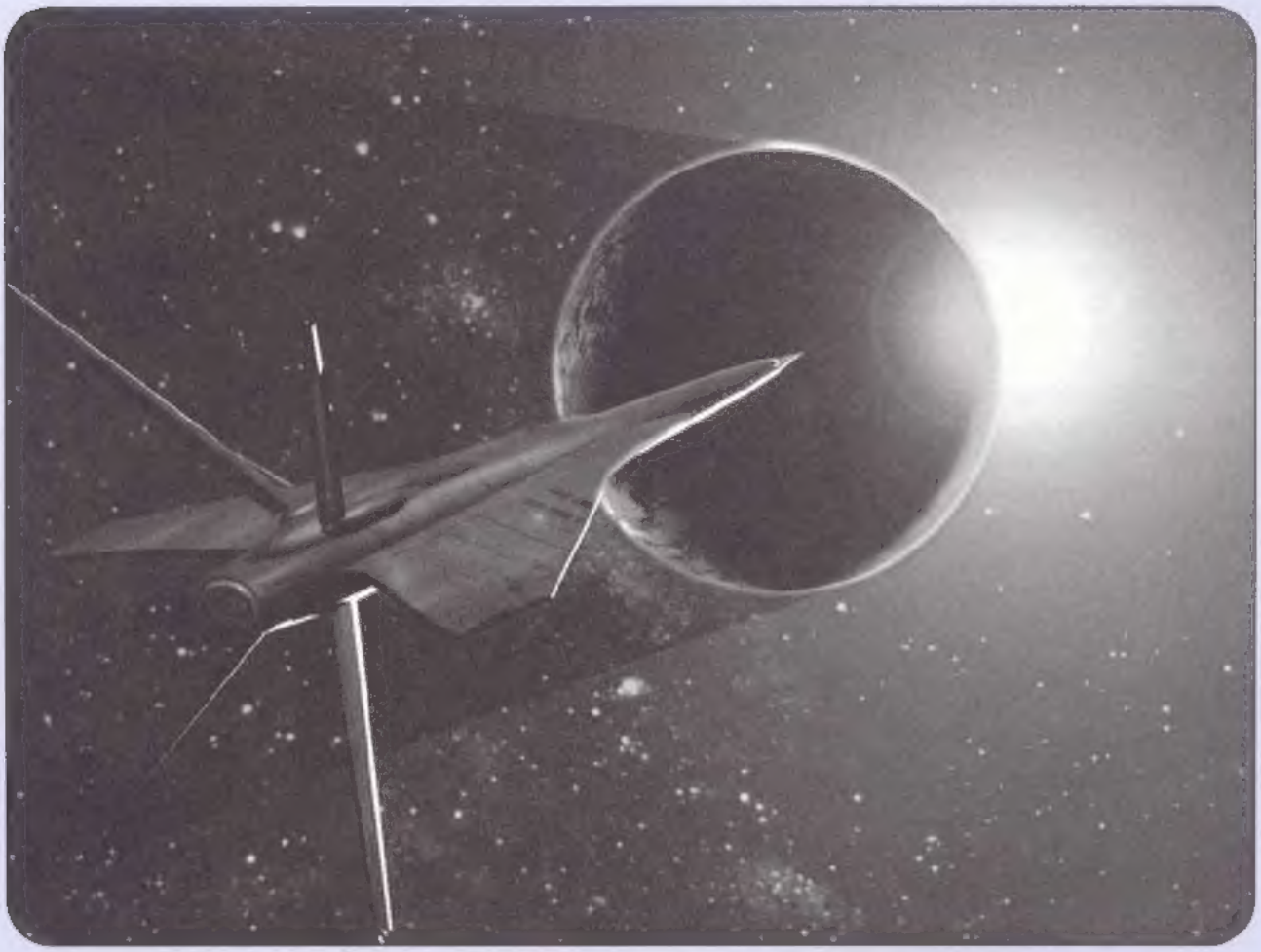
The history of the Verge as a whole is closely tied to that of Aegis and the Regency of Bluefall. Indeed, only Tendril and Hammer's Star can claim to match this system in importance, and the importance of Bluefall and its role as the metropolitan center of the Verge grows every day.

2314 The history of humankind in the Verge begins when the explorers aboard the StarMech Collective survey vessel *Grim Determination* reach the Tendril system.

2315 Roughly a year after *Grim Determination* explores Tendril, the first human colonists reach the Verge aboard a fleet of StarMech Collective colony vessels. They promptly establish a large colony on Alaundril, a habitable moon circling the Jovian world Sperous.

2316 Orion deep space exploration vessel *DSX Marathon* wraps up an extended tour of unexplored space when they arrive in the Aegis system. They recognize at once the value of this system and its Class I world.

2326 A trio of Orion colony transports (*Miranda, Annabella,*



and *Victoria*) arrive at Bluefall under the command of William Tribane. They establish the colony of Tribane Island on Bluefall, the first human settlement in the Aegis system.

2327 The Orions establish small settlements on a number of Bluefall's other islands. These include meteorological stations, communications relays, and the like. In short order, small communities form around these facilities.

2330 An oceanographic survey station established near Tribane Island announces the discovery of large petroleum reserves. Within a year, Orion engineers dig the first test wells.

2342 The Orion government establishes the Verge Stock Exchange (commonly called the VSE or Vessie) on Bluefall as a means of conducting colonial trade in the Verge. In future years, it becomes a dominant factor in Verge economics.

2345 Recognizing the potential importance of his world in shaping the future of the Verge, Governor Tribane extends an open invitation to any who would like to immigrate to Bluefall. Settlers are welcome anywhere on the planet (or in the Aegis system, for that matter) save for Tribane Island. Only Orions may request permission to settle on Tribane Island. (This policy remains in effect to this day, although mounting population pressures have led Regent Hale to consider its repeal.)

2346 The Thuldan Empire funds and supports the Mutant Uprising on Tau Ceti in the Union of Sol. This quickly escalates to become the Second Galactic War.

2346 As the first battles of GW2 are being fought at the core of human space, over 1 million new colonists have accepted Governor Tribane's invitation and immigrated to Bluefall.

2346 The first Jubilee Resort opens on Tribane Island. This hotel and spa sets the standard for luxury accommodations on Bluefall and throughout the Verge.

2347 Governor Tribane takes his own life. He leaves no suicide note and, to this day, many speculate that political rivals murdered him.

2348 Admiral Patrick Christopher, commander of the dreadnought *Triumphant*, declares martial law. He appoints his aide, Commander Kathryn Windsor-Lynn, as planetary administrator.

2349 Admiral Christopher divides the Orion Verge Fleet into three distinct task forces. He assigns the first of these, led by the *Challenger*, to the Stellar Ring to join with other Orion forces in fighting GW2; the second, led by the *Valiant*, to patrol the Verge to protect Orion interests; and the third, based around Christopher's own *Triumphant*, to defend Bluefall and provide command and control for all Orion forces in the Verge.

2350 As war rages in the Stellar Ring, supply convoys to the Verge become fewer and farther between. In place of these valuable supply convoys, increasing numbers of refugees flow through the Tendril system. These people, hoping to escape the terrors of war, place a greater strain on Verge economies.

2351 Human expansion and exploration slow to a halt as the stellar nations turn their attention to the Second Galactic War. At this point, human colonies now spread across some 2,000 light-years.

2353 Admiral Christopher releases the *Valiant* and her task force from duty in the Verge and reassigns them to the Stellar Ring. Only *Triumphant* and her support vessels remain to protect Orion interests in the Verge.

2356 Admiral Christopher announces that the main body of the Orion military urgently needs his ships. He leads the last Orion warships away from Aegis and back to the Stellar Ring.

2358 Following the first, temporary failure of the link to the Kendai drivesat, economic panic begins to spread through the Verge. Lesser economies are unable to survive and simply fade away as their inhabitants seek safe harbor in more prosperous systems such as Aegis, Tendril, or Hammer's Star.

2360 An influx of refugees from other Verge systems places great strains on the economies of Aegis, Tendril, and Hammer's Star. Lesser colonies continue to fail or suffer great hardship without support from the Stellar Ring.

2375 The battleship *Triumphant* and her battle group arrive at the Kendai system just in time to find themselves swept up in a titanic fleet action. During the Battle of Kendai, Admiral Christopher is killed and the system's drivesat destroyed. This severs communication lines with the Verge and marks the beginning of the Long Silence.

2377 Acting Governor Windsor-Lynn of the Bluefall colony launches a humanitarian relief effort known as the Bluefall Economic and Commercial Outreach Network (or BEACON). Through the auspices of BEACON, many colonies on the edge of social and economic collapse are saved. While the economy of the Verge continues to decline, BEACON manages to slow the process considerably.

2384 Governor Windsor-Lynn dies unexpectedly in her sleep. Assistant Governor Michael Sapienza assumes leadership of the Bluefall colony with a promise to continue the humanitarian work of his predecessor. He increases funding for BEACON.

2395 Governor Sapienza announces the launching of BEACON's Operation Safe Haven. Under the auspices of this new program, the Bluefall navy joins BEACON ships in actively seeking out the survivors of failing colonies and transporting these refugees to Bluefall.

2430 In an effort to maintain civilization in the Verge, a number of powers support the formation of the Redman-Smith Trading Corporation. Loosely based on the model of BEACON, the RSTC doesn't restore commerce in the Verge to anything like pre-Silence levels, but it does finally halt the downward economic spiral threatening to overwhelm the struggling systems of the Verge.

2451 Thanks in no small part to the success of Operation Safe Haven, the population of Bluefall nears 10 million.

Another million or so are present elsewhere in the Aegis system.

2452 BEACON and Bluefall naval vessels returning to the Aegis system discover that is utterly uninhabited. In what comes to be called The Vanishing, all intelligent life in the Aegis system mysteriously vanished on July 22. No evidence exists of any hostile action by an outside force. An investigation begins at once, but no explanation follows.

2452 As word of the Vanishing spreads throughout the Verge, fear grips the colonies. Because nothing suggests what happened to the citizens of the Aegis system, no one sets forth any clear plan to prevent it from happening again. Many colonies begin to arm themselves as best they can in case this proves to be the precursor of some alien invasion.

2454 Despite the fears of Verge citizens, the Vanishing appears to be an isolated event. No evidence of alien aggression develops in the wake of the loss of Aegis' population. The Orion officers of the Bluefall Colonial Navy abandon the system, most returning to the Stellar Ring and the horrors of the war there. Some others head for other worlds in the Verge. A very few people opt to resettle the planet, hoping that whatever claimed the original colonists ignores them. Approximately 1,100 people become the self-appointed custodians of Tribune Island. A few other colonies remain on Bluefall or elsewhere in the system, but the population of Aegis now numbers fewer than 10,000.

2456 In an effort to tame his idealistic and rebellious son Christopher, President Warthen Hale of the Orion League enrolls him in the prestigious Starcrest military academy on Ericis. Christopher balks at this proposal, but is unable to resist his father's mandate.

2457 Hale's early days are difficult, as many upperclassmen take great glee in hazing the son of the Orion League's president. In addition, his calls for an end to GW2 place him at odds with the hawkish faculty at Ericis. Despite his original place as an outcast, however, Hale's natural charisma and passionate nature quickly win him a circle of loyal friends.

2458 As the months go by, it becomes apparent that Warthen Hale's plan to reshape his son is failing. The younger Hale has spread his views to his classmates. In his second year at Starcrest, Hale forms the Student Reform Coalition. Hale organizes numerous SRC rallies at the academy. Others pick up his message, who quickly spread it to other schools on Ericis and beyond.

2459 Christopher Hale's SRC followers disrupt graduation exercises at Starcrest. School authorities imprison Hale and attempt to disband the SRC. This only makes matters worse; within a few weeks a massive student revolt sweeps through the numerous schools and colleges of Ericis (including Starcrest itself).

2460 The situation on Ericis grows worse. The student uprising becomes a planet-wide rebellion. Calls for an end to GW2 go forth not only from the students and young, but also from many other levels of society. Warthen Hale orders the authorities on Ericis to implement martial law to regain control. The citizens of Ericis respond with an open revolt, a declaration of independence, and an offer to negotiate an armistice. The revolutionaries free Christopher Hale from prison. Several Orion Navy vessels elect to join the rebels on Ericis, including the battle cruisers *Sword of Orion* and *Thunderer*. Warthen Hale orders the Navy and Marines to "use whatever forces necessary" to bring the populace of Ericis under control.

2460 Recognizing that his followers cannot stand against the forces assembling against them, Hale leads a fleet of several hundred ships in a massive exodus from the Ericis system. Only a few hours after their departure, the remains of the revolutionary government on Ericis surrenders unconditionally to the Orion Navy. The commander of the naval task force dispatches part of his force to pursue *Sword of Orion, Thunderer,* and the other ships in Hale's armada.

2461 President Warthen Hale orders that the rebels on Ericis not be punished for their actions. He personally recalls the ships hunting Hale's armada. In a stirring public address, President Warthen Hale announces that he no longer considers Christopher Hale his son. He further orders Orion fleets not to challenge Hale's armada, provided it leaves Orion space at once. In closing, he revokes the citizenship of all those aboard the ships.

2462 Christopher Hale's message of peace begins to spread inexorably through Orion space. Without responding to his father's statement of exile, Hale orders the fleet to turn toward the Orion border. Many historians trace the final end of hostilities in GW2 to the grass roots movement begun on Ericis in 2458.

2463 After months of travel, Hale's fleet sets its sights on the long-neglected Verge. As they leave the Stellar Ring behind, other ships join the fleet.

2464 Hale's armada, swollen to nearly 1,000 ships, arrives in the Aegis system. The news of its arrival spreads rapidly through the Verge. With it comes the realization that the stellar nations have now been locked in the Second Galactic War for well over a century. This news brings new life to the desire of Vergers to look to themselves for survival.

2465 As the new settlers of Bluefall begin to revive the all but abandoned colony, Christopher Hale's message of peace continues to bear fruit in Old Space. The indirect result of these ideals brings about the Alkaid Conference, where representatives of the Orion League, Rigunmor Star Consortium, and Thuidan Empire begin to lay the groundwork for an end to GW2.

2465 After fifteen months of rule based on the chain of command established for Hale's armada, Hale and his followers establish the Regency as the official civilian government of Bluefall. Pressured by those who have

followed him from the Stellar Ring, Christopher Hale accepts the title of Regent.

2468 At Hale's request, representatives of other Verge worlds meet on Bluefall to discuss political stability. Working from the assumption that the Verge is cut off from the rest of humanity for the foreseeable future, these diplomats form the Verge Confederation.

2469 Despite the initial hopes of unity established by the Verge Confederation, it soon becomes clear that this informal alliance lacks the cohesion to be an effective government. Bitter rivalries, especially those centered around the Algemron system, hamstring it from its inception. Although Regent Hale still sees the Confederation as an important first step, most of the other leaders in the Verge have all but forgotten the promises they had made only a year before.

2470 Recognizing the need for a wet navy on the water world of Bluefall, Christopher Hale signs an executive order establishing the Regency Sea Navy (RSN). Hale appoints Mary Kytola, one his instructors at Starcrest, as Secretary of the Sea Navy.

2472 With military forces in Old Space at an all time low due to excessive losses, all sides take the final steps on the road to peace: The stellar nations sign the Treaty of Concord. This not only ends the Second Galactic War, but also establishes the Galactic Concord.

2478 On Bluefall, construction begins on the Depth Epsilon undersea colony. Although technically a government project, the Regency intends the design and building of this impressive structure to jump-start the sluggish economy of the fledgling Bluefall colony.

2480 Spurred by the success of the Depth Epsilon project and similar ventures, the industrial importance of Bluefall rises rapidly. Many other Verge colonies once again look to the new colony of Bluefall for guidance.

2485 At a special economic summit on Bluefall, the majority of the Verge's leading industries agree to a system of trading guidelines. Chief among the results of this meeting is the reestablishment of the Verge Stock Exchange (VSE or Vessie).

2489 On May 3rd, unknown forces destroy the Borealin colony Silver Bell on Spes in the Hammer's Star system. Unlike the Vanishing, where no evidence existed to explain the loss of the colony, this was an act of hostility.

2489 Citing the destruction of the Silver Bell colony as evidence that the Verge faces greater threats than isolation, Christopher Hale announces the official formation of the Regency Stellar Navy (RSN). He appoints Admiral Jane Tolson, one-time commander of the Orion battle cruiser *Thunderer*, its Secretary.

2490 Regent Hale invokes the all-but-forgotten articles of the Verge Confederation. Representatives of several Verge colonies gather on Bluefall to consider the destruction of Silver Bell. They sign a mutual defense pact, although internal dissent makes it impossible to specify levels of commitment. Analysts consider it far less than Hale hoped for.

2491 On Bluefall, Claris Acrim opens the Acrim Desalination Facility. Although a masterpiece of design and engineering, many consider it economic overkill as its capacity exceeds Bluefall's population of 200 million needs.

2493 As the population of Bluefall continues to rise steadily, construction on the experimental submersible floating city Depth Zeta begins. Many investors see this project as a chance to prove that Bluefall's technological ability is the equal of its industrial and economic might.

2495 A meeting is held in the Tendril system to discuss a joint Bluefall/Tendril mission to the Stellar Ring. The battle cruiser *Thunderer* and her Tendril counterpart *Vindication* lead this operation, optimistically dubbed *Operation Homecoming*.

2496 Even as *Thunderer* and *Vindication* are making ready to depart the Verge, the Concord Navy effects repairs to the drivesat station at Kendai. The governments of Aegis and Tendril cancel *Operation Homecoming*.

2496 Word of Silver Bell's destruction reaches the Stellar Ring via the Kendai drivesat, sending shock waves through human space. For the first time since humans took to the stars, they have made contact with an alien species whose technology, military might, and hostility are equal to their own.

2497 Recognizing the importance of renewed contact with the stellar nations, representatives of the Tendril Syndicates and the Bluefall Regency call the second meeting of the Verge Confederation.

2497 The Concord fortress ship *Monitor* makes its way to the Silver Bell colony. Its route takes it through the Tendril and Aegis systems, providing both of these important states with ample evidence of the power remaining in Old Space. In a message to his Concord superiors, Fleet Admiral Vincent Walker, a veteran of GW2, confirms the reports of earlier Verge expeditions to the system. His communication ends with the chilling, oft-quoted words: "We face a threat unlike any we have confronted before. On the heels of a bitter civil war, we have discovered an enemy whose savagery equals even our own."

2497 The Galactic Concord assumes control of the Verge Stock Exchange and applies subtle pressure on every major power in the region to adopt the Concord Dollar as its standard currency.

2497 Representatives of the Regency Stellar Navy commission the construction of the dreadnought *Sanctuary* at StarMech shipyards. A number of lesser naval contracts quickly follow this groundbreaking agreement, enhancing the military might of the Regency and resulting in closer ties between Bluefall and StarMech.

2498 Ships from the Oriamu Theocracy arrive in the Aegis system with the stated purpose of investigating the Vanishing.

They purchase rights to settle the island of Jort and lay the groundwork for Bluefall's first major non-Orion colony.

2498 A Thuldan fleet enters the Aegis system and attempts to secure a foothold on Bluefall. After being warned off by the Regency, they attempt to land legions on the surface. Stiff resistance from the Regency Planetary Defense Force (RPDF) not only turns aside the invaders but also decimates the Thuldan fleet.

2498 Hale recognizes RPDF commander General Nadine Cox for her tactical skill in the defense of Regency Island with an appointment to the post of Secretary of the Army.

2498 Bowing to pressure from the scientific community, the Regency establishes Research Station Echo on Jetsam's only moon, Flotsam. (Research Station Echo is actually a covert military listening post.)

2498 Construction begins on the Depth Eta floating city, just offshore of Regency Island.

2499 Backed by a ceremony designed to show one and all the ever-strengthening ties between the Galactic Concord and the Regency of Bluefall, the Concord establishes a diplomatic consulate on the equatorial island of Diandes.

2499 Regent Hale secretly begins recruiting mindwalkers for an elite psionicist unit. The executive order mandating this effort demands of its commanders to consider only "individuals of unquestioned loyalty, exceptional talent, and sterling character" for this unit.

2500 The population of Bluefall swells as nearly 16 million sentients immigrate in the last year. Although the majority of citizens are of Orion stock, a growing and increasingly diverse minority voices its opposition to the previously unquestioned rule of Christopher Hale. This is most apparent in the formation of a political opposition group known as Citizens for a Free Republic. While respecting the skill with which Hale has shaped Bluefall in the past, the CFR calls for free elections.

2500 The submarine RBV *Glory* makes contact with the deepfallen. Although the Regency makes the news of the encounter public, they release only some of the information they discover. The curtain of secrecy that falls over negotiations with the deepfallen further increases dissent among the human population of Bluefall.

2500 In August, a violent earthquake nearly destroys the Depth Epsilon facility. An emergency evacuation manages to keep loss of life to a minimum. Regency Sea Navy submersibles investigate the site of the disaster and report that Depth Epsilon is beyond repair; they quarantine the entire area. (In fact, this is a carefully managed operation by the Regency to establish a secure location to meet with the deepfallen. The 1000 or so people who "lost their lives" are actually scientists, diplomats, and xenologists who are permanently stationed at the "wrecked" facility.)

2500 VoidCorp completes negotiations with the Regency and begins construction of a major gas mine in the upper atmosphere of the gas giant Redcrown.

2501 StarMech proudly delivers the dreadnought *Sanctuary* to the Regency Stellar Navy well ahead of schedule and slightly under budget. *Sanctuary* replaces the battle cruiser *Hughes* as the flagship of the fleet.

2501 Regency estimates place the population of Bluefall at roughly 427 million, of which some 300 million are of Orion heritage.

2501 The t'sa colony ship *Guardian* arrives and her captain requests citizenship for the 1.2 million t'sa aboard her. After considerable delays, the Regency grants them permission to settle on Bluefall. The t'sa take possession of Rehja, a small island roughly halfway between Diandes and Yimfar.

2501 Accusing the Regency of ignoring their calls for reform, the Citizens for a Free Republic begin terrorist activities on Regency Island. This includes a series of bomb blasts that disrupt the normal celebration of Founders Day as well as several attempts to assassinate Regency officials.

2501 Commander Kalden, a close friend of Regent Hale and the head of the Regency Island Guard, marries Raiaza Krayjal, an Orlamu military officer. Although many question the motives behind this wedding, there can be no doubt that it does a great deal to improve relationships between the Regency and Orlamu Theocracy. Much publicity surrounds this wedding as many of Bluefall's settlers remember Kalden fondly as the charismatic sidekick of Christopher Hale during the Flight from Ericis.

2501 Regent Hale officially announces the formation of the 118th Psychological Operations Battalion.

2501 The Bluefall Regency announces that it shall provide financial and logistical sponsorship for the newly formed Merchant League. Although many renounce this as an attempt to disrupt the powerful Redman-Smith Trading Corporation and strengthen Bluefall's control over the Verge economy, the Galactic Concord, Orlamu Theocracy, and StarMech Collective endorse the organization as a valuable addition to the mercantile establishment of the Verge.

2501 The Galactic Concord and the Regency hold joint naval exercises in the Aegis system. Although the ostensible purpose of these maneuvers is to increase preparedness in the face of possible External attacks, some cynics suggest their primary purpose is instead to serve as a warning to an increasingly aggressive Thuldan presence in the Aegis system.

2502 The VoidCorp gas mine on Redcrown begins preoperation checks. The giant corporation expects the facility to become fully operational sometime in the second quarter of 2503.

2502 In an effort to resolve the Verge's many interstellar disputes, Galactic Court Justice Sheila Lecoq arrives on Bluefall. When her gavel falls in the Hall of Justice on Diandes, the Galactic Concord establishes itself as the final word in all Verge legal matters.

2503 The Present.

Chapter Two: System Survey

When Robin Hughes and the crew of the scout *Marathon* completed their starfall into the Aegis system 2316, they were justifiably elated. After many months of cataloging one unexciting system after another, they had finally hit the jackpot.

Of course, they had had high hopes when they began the final leg of their journey to Aegis. They knew the system to have planets and that its primary was remarkably like Earth's own sun. What the crew could never have foreseen, however, was the magnitude of the planetary treasure trove into which *Marathon* was about to plunge.

The importance of the system can be seen in the fact that other stars in the Verge sector define their locations relative to Aegis. This convention is unlikely to change any time soon, but irritates certain members of the StarMech Collective, who are quick to remind everyone that their colony in the Tendril system was the first in Verge space.

The trio of worlds which orbit this binary pair are a study in contrast. One is an earth-like prize, one a gas giant encircled by a glistening ring system, and the last a curious fragment of stellar debris marking the edge of the system.

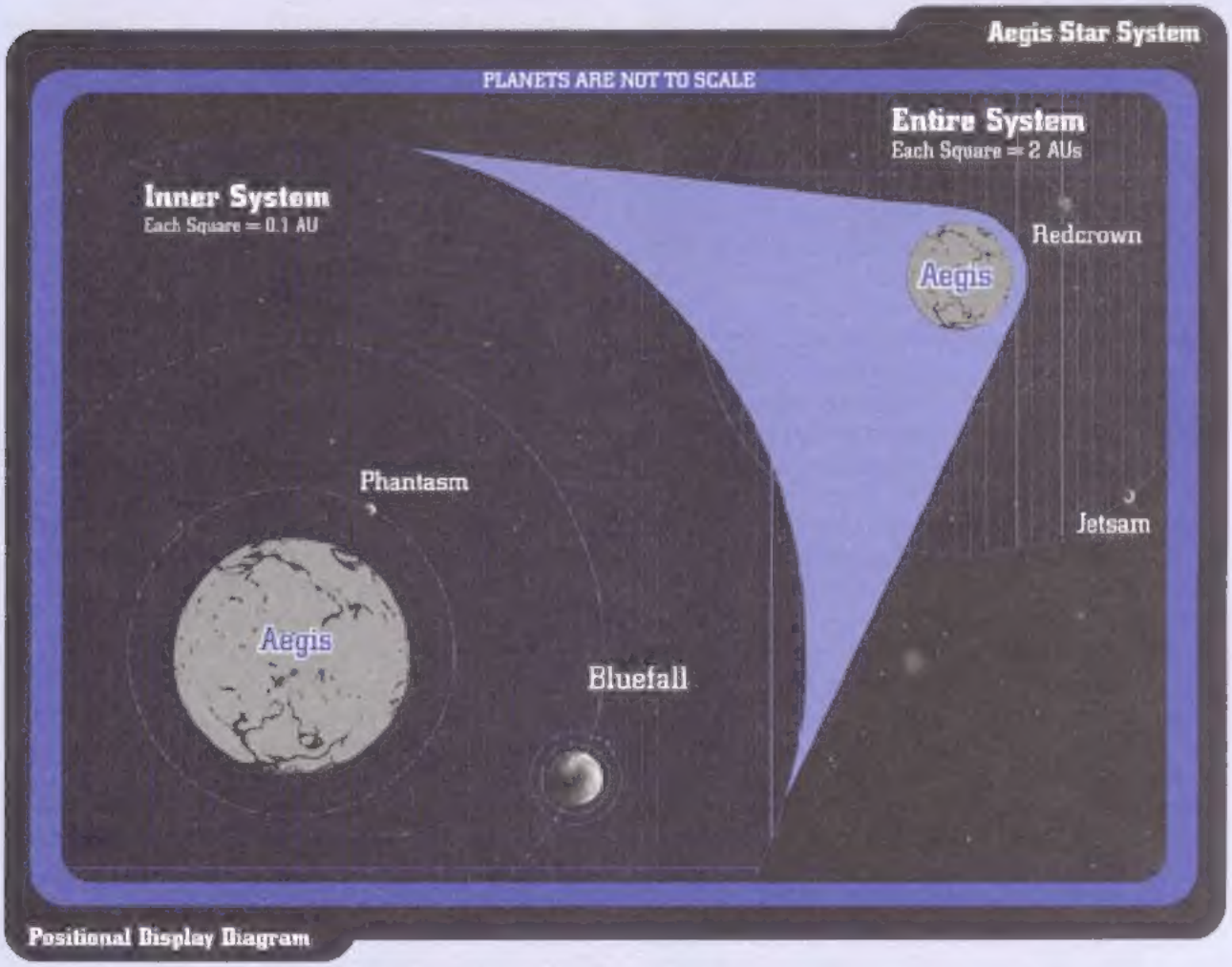
System Data

Sector:	The Verge
Location (X/Y/Z):	+0/+0/+0
Number of Stars:	2
Separation:	0.19 AU
No. of Planets:	3

The information presented in this chapter is based on the detailed surveys done by Hughes and his crew, the Regency of Bluefall, and several other groups. It focuses primarily on the nature of the system itself, making only passing comments about the sentients who inhabit it. This sourcebook deals with these matters in a later chapter.

Stellar Information

At the heart of the system is a pair of stars. The first is a brilliant G2 star, almost identical in every way to the Earth's own Sol. Its companion, an insignificant red dwarf, orbits the other almost forgotten by the inhabitants of the Aegis system.



Aegis

The Aegis system was named for the golden shield carried by the god Zeus and his daughter Athena. Over the decades since the system was first explored, the name has proven especially appropriate. With each passing year, the system becomes increasingly important. If the threat of the seemingly implacable klicks or other External species does erupt into warfare, the Aegis system may become the shield which protects the Verge.

Aegis itself is an unremarkable G2 V star. While most G-class stars rotate fairly slowly, however, the influence of its companion gives Aegis a shorter rotation period. Thus, while Sol takes 27 days to turn once on its axis, Aegis completes each rotation in just over half that time (15 days).

This swift rotation, as well as the gravitational attraction of its companion, results in a distinct flattening of the star. Although this deformation is not visible to the unaided eye, observers using even the most rudimentary equipment can easily spot it. Further, astronomers generally credit it with making the star somewhat more active than other yellow suns. The cycle of Aegis' solar activity spans a period of roughly 10.5 years (as opposed to Sol's own 11-year cycle). By any standard, however, the solar activity of Aegis is insignificant when compared to the furious Burns of the dying Tendril.

With a surface temperature of 5800° Kelvin, Aegis is only slightly less luminous than Sol. Its absolute magnitude of 4.822 is also nearly identical to Sol's (4.79). Being somewhat smaller than Sol, Aegis is also slightly less massive than its distant cousin is. These differences, however, are nearly insignificant in astronomical terms.

Scientists estimate temperatures at the core of Aegis, where its thermonuclear reactions take place, to be near 15 million degrees Kelvin. Unmanned solar penetration probes deployed in 2499 by the Galactic Concord Research Cruiser *Decouverte* appear to confirm these estimates.

Sunspots and plages (bright spots) mar the surface of Aegis. The latter occur most frequently in conjunction with the darker sunspots. While the magnetic field of Aegis is generally in the neighborhood of 1 gauss, it has been measured at some 3,000 times that level in the dark expanses of the sunspots. In addition to their different magnetic fields, Aegis's sunspots are also some 1,500 degrees cooler than the surrounding photosphere. The size of Aegis's sunspots range from as small as 1,000 km to as large as 40,000 km. Sunspot activity on Aegis follows a very regular 10.5 year cycle which last peaked in 2497.

The polarity of Aegis' magnetic field periodically reverses. This reversal occurs regularly every two decades. The next reversal should coincide with the peak of sunspot activity in 2507 or 2508.

Phantasm

Aegis's companion, an M9 VI known as Phantasm, is a smoldering ember throwing out a frail light which is all but smothered by its brighter neighbor. Phantasm circles the system's primary almost like a planet (although, in truth, the two stars revolve slowly around a central point). Only 0.19 AUs separate the two stars. It takes Phantasm some 78 days to complete on orbit around Aegis.

Phantasm puts out far less energy than Aegis, with an absolute bolometric magnitude of only 15.3 and a stellar luminosity of 0.00006. Indeed, much of the energy Phantasm does emit falls in the infrared range of the spectrum. Survey data assembled by *Decouverte* places the surface temperature at only 2400° Kelvin. Solar penetration probes indicate that the convection layer, as is often the case with red dwarves, extends to the core of the star, effectively eliminating the defined internal structure of its companion.

Sunspots and plages continually wrack the surface of Phantasm, although the latter are usually faint even by red dwarf standards. Despite this turbulent surface, however, the star's magnetic field is almost beneath notice.

The close proximity of Phantasm to Aegis has left the former star tidally locked with its companion. The gravitational pull of the larger star has warped the red dwarf, giving it a slight teardrop shape. A tenuous stream of matter links the two stars, but only astrophysical sensors can detect this.

Stellar Data

Name	Aegis	Phantasm
Spectral Class	G2 V	M9 VI
Absolute Magnitude	4.822	15.3
Luminosity*	0.994	0.00006
Temperature (Kelvin)	5800°	2400°
Solar Radii*	0.992	0.053
Solar Masses*	0.994	0.058
Rotation Period	15 days	78 days
Orbital Period	N/A	78 days
Sunspot Cycle	10.5 years	6.25 years
Polarity Cycle	21 years	12.5 years
Magnetic Field	0.997 gauss	0.701 gauss

*Sol equals 1.00

Planetary Data

The Aegis/Phantasm pair has a small family of planets associated with it. Although most people believe they orbit around Aegis, that's not actually the case. In truth, these worlds circle the pair as if it were a single mass. This misconception is meaningless in the daily lives of Bluefall's citizenry.

Azure and Cerulea

A pair of moons, Azure and Cerulea, circles Bluefal. Both are small masses of nickel-iron believed to be captured asteroids. The peanut-shaped Azure is the larger of the two, although it measures only about 15 kilometers at its widest point. Cerulea is roughly half the size of its sister (about 7 km) and is much more regular in shape. The relationship of their orbits and geophysical similarities has led many astrophysicists to conclude that Azure and Cerulea were once a single body. Exactly what caused this object (which most

simply call Azure Prime) to fracture is unknown, but tidal forces from the much larger Bluefall seem to be the most likely culprit.

Although the people of Bluefall seldom have any reason to consider the matter, they are fortunate that neither Azure nor Cerulea is significantly larger. If a moon even half the size of Terra's own circled Bluefall, the tides in her oceans would regularly inundate the islands. As it is, Bluefall's seas are relatively still, churned only by gravitational pull of the distant Aegis/Phantasm pair and, to a much lesser extent, the even more distant Redcrown.

Redcrown

The second planet out from the Aegis/Phantasm pair is Redcrown, a splendid gas giant with its own system of planet-sized moons and a series of colorful rings. Although noted for its ruddy color, Redcrown's swirling clouds make it shine brightly in the night sky of distant Bluefall.

Redcrown turns on its axis every 11 hours as it sweeps gracefully through its 8.92-year orbit. The planet's orbit is very regular, with an eccentricity of only 0.0003, making it more nearly circular even than Bluefall's. Unlike Bluefall, however, Redcrown has a pronounced axial tilt of 26°

Physically, Redcrown is very much like distant Saturn in the Sol system. It is just under 130,000 kilometers in diameter and has a very low density (only 0.09 that of Earth) This gives it a mass roughly 92 times that of Earth. Deep penetration probes deployed by both *Marathon* and *Decouverte* indicate that Redcrown's core is a roughly Bluefall-sized, iron-rich globe of ammonia, methane, and water. This is further surrounded by a 20,000 kilometer shell of liquid metallic hydrogen and then by the tumultuous clouds of vapor.

A dynamo reaction caused by the planet's rapid rotation and metallic hydrogen layer creates a fierce magnetic field. Ships nearing Redcrown encounter its bow shock at just under 2 million kilometers from the planet and its magnetosphere at roughly one quarter that distance.

Redcrown's atmosphere is a stormy mixture of hydrogen and helium. Meteorological probes and monitoring stations on the planet's fledgling gas mines indicate that winds in the upper atmosphere have been known to reach nearly 800 kilometers per hour.

Some researchers speculate that Redcrown may be a failed star, as it emits roughly 1.5 times as much energy as it receives from Aegis/Phantasm. Similar conditions mark both Jupiter and Saturn in the Terra system. Much of Redcrown's energy emissions take the form of radio waves, mainly in the 100 to 500KHz range. The intensity of these emissions varies with the planet's 11-hour rotation period.

A small armada of moons circles Redcrown. Ten of these are large, planetary bodies. Another 15 asteroid bodies also circle the planet, although these are of no real importance and are generally ignored by stellar navigators.

Planetary Data: Redcrown

Summary Data

Environment:	Class 5 Jovian
Gravity:	G3 (0.91 g)
Radiation:	R2 (6.2 rem/wk)
Atmosphere:	A1 (H_2, He
Pressure:	P5 (Jovian
Base Temp:	H0 (–160° C)

Orbital Data

Distance:	8.31 AU
Rotation Period (Day):	11.4 hours
Revolution Period (Year):	8.92 years
Eccentricity:	0.0003
Axial Tilt:	26°

Physical Data

Diameter:	129,006 km
Structure:	Radiating Jovian
Density:	0.09 Terra
Mass:	92.04 Terra
Gravity:	0.91 g
Moons:	10 (Planetary

Climate Data

Atmospheric Composition:	Hydrogen/Helium
Atmospheric Pressure:	Jovian
Cloud Coverage:	100%
Hydrosphere Composition:	Not applicable
Hydrosphere Coverage:	Not applicable
Average Albedo:	0.6201

Ring System

Most gas giants have some type of ring system surrounding them. The most spectacular example of these is, without a doubt, the stunning bands in the Delta Taurus system in Rigunmor space. The unusual nature of the Redcrown ring system more than makes up for its fairly bland nature, however.

Primary Ring

Redcrown's primary ring is a wan, ghostly stream of shimmering white drifting forever around the gas giant's equator. It is bright enough to be visible with a basic telescope from the surface of Bluefall. From the surface of one of the Jovian world's many moons, they are beautiful to behold.

In actuality, the primary ring is composed of several dozen lesser structures called bands. The bands are separated from each other by narrow gaps formed by a small armada of shepherd asteroids.

The magnetic fields of Redcrown also play a major role in shaping the rings, creating wedge-shaped spokes that appear and then vanish over the course of several local days

Perhaps the most interesting feature of Redcrown's primary ring is its so-called shadows. These are not actually patches of darkness, but collections of darker particles drawn together by the dynamic action of the planet's magnetic field. Like the spokes, these shadows tend to form, break up, and then reform in new patterns every few days. Most of these shadows are actually invisible to the naked eye, but enhanced images of them are more popular than true color depictions of the otherwise fairly featureless rings.

Although the primary ring system is composed mostly of ice crystals and dust, there are also traces of iridium, titanium, silver, and other valuable resources here. The concentration of these more important ores is very low, however, making any mining unprofitable.

The most recent of these, Redcrown Resources Unlimited, was an independent venture funded by a group of small corporations on Bluefall. RRU collapsed after less than two years of operation, dragging half of its backers into bankruptcy as well. As of 2502, all efforts to prospect in the primary ring system have been abandoned.

Secondary Ring

Redcrown's secondary ring system is unique in explored space. In fact, it is so unusual that the crew of *Marathon* believed them to be some sort of optical illusion or sensor ghost when they first detected them. Indeed, when Hughes submitted his report on Aegis, he announced that he would have called such a structure impossible if he hadn't seen it with his own eyes.

The secondary ring is far more tenuous than the primary and is composed almost wholly of ionized hydrogen particles. It is visible from the inner moons, but not from Lhop or distant Bluefall.

Many theories exist about this astronomical anomaly, but the most prominent was put forth by the famed Iraal physicist Eefaza. He believes that a comet or other body struck Redcrown only a few years before humanity came to the Aegis system in 2316. This was a glancing blow that hit near the planet's south pole. The existence of a fading, but still-sizable storm at some 80° south latitude seems to support Eefaza's theory. This blow hurled a large quantity of Redcrown's atmosphere into space, although not beyond the grip of its gravitational field. The planet's magnetic field captured the matter and shaped it into a ring by the lines of flux.

The structure of the ring system is naturally unstable. Redcrown's gravitational and magnetic fields spend all their time gradually ripping these rings apart. Indeed, researchers expect the secondary ring to disappear in about 25 years.

Moons

Redcrown is circled by ten moons, which range in character from small nickel-iron rocks to terrestrial planets in their own right. Each of these moons bears the name of a member of *Marathon's* crew. These moons range in importance from the as yet unexploited Raeb and Avob to the heavily mined Lhop and Nevin.

Only three of Redcrown's moons (Nirb, Aocho, and Lhop) have an appreciable atmosphere and only one (Nirb) has any manner of sea, although it is composed primarily of ammonia. The average surface temperature of Redcrown's moons hovers around –160° Celsius. None of them can claim native life, although most of them have become home to human colonies.

Kralc

The innermost of Redcrown's moons, Kralc is a dark world roughly 8,000 kilometers in diameter. A good source of valuable metals, Kralc has a density of 0.96 and a surface gravity of 0.6 g. A tenuous atmosphere of nitrogen and methane clings to the surface of this impact-scarred sphere.

Kralc orbits only 133,509 kilometers from Redcrown, closer to the planet than anything but its ring system. It takes Kralc only 21 hours 45 minutes to circle its massive Jovian parent. From the surface of Kralc, the crimson clouds of Redcrown dominate the sky, filling over 38° of arc. The ring system only increases the splendid views available to Kralc's colonists.

The surface of Kralc is, like most of Redcrown's moons, composed of fine, dark regolith. Occasional swatches of color mark the sites of recent impacts, although Kralc is not nearly so badly scarred as its neighbors are. The most prominent feature on the surface of Kralc is Old Scratch, a long scar in the surface believed to have resulted from a very low-angle asteroid impact. It is believed that the force of this impact may have fractured the moon, covering much of the surface with a layer of magma. This theory would also explain the relatively minimal cratering on the rest of the surface.

The Regency of Bluefall recognizes the claim of the Galactic Concord to this tiny moon. While plans are in the works to turn Kralc into a shipyard, delays and budget concerns have prevented anything but the planning stage thus far. At the moment, the Concord maintains a mining and ore-processing facility on Kralc, but little more.

Rumors abound that the delays in construction of the shipyard facility are actually the result of some disturbing discovery beneath the surface of Kralc, although Concord sources deny this. No doubt much of this speculation is fueled by the continued mystery surrounding contact with the deepfallen on Bluefall.

Nevin

Redcrown's second moon, Nevin, orbits at a distance of roughly 260,000 kilometers. Just over 1,500 kilometers in diameter and with a density of only 0.62, Nevin's surface gravity is a feeble 0.08 g. Like Kralc, the view of Redcrown from the surface of Nevin is splendid as the Jovian itself dominates its sky. It takes Nevin roughly 33 hours to orbit Redcrown.

The heavily cratered surface of Nevin gives the world a jagged, chipped appearance. The most noteworthy feature on the moon is a relatively smooth expanse of material created when an asteroid or comet dealt a massive blow to the moon. The resulting magma flows created a roughly circular expanse of very dark, almost black, material that Hughes dubbed the Midnight Valley

Nevin is honeycombed with mines left over from the original colony established here before the Vanishing Many of these have since been reactivated, as the valuable platinum deposits that lace Nevin's crust are too tempting to ignore. Vast deposits of copper and chromium combine with the platinum to make this satellite the economic treasure trove of the system. Many of the pre Van ishing facilities remain almost exactly as the system's original inhabitants left them. Because of this, many refer to Nevin as the Ghost Moon

Nirb

Continuing outward from Redcrown, the green-hued Nirb hangs in space at a distance of about 450,000 kilometers It takes this unusual moon just over 3 days (75 hours) to orbit its parent. With a diameter of roughly 4,750 kilometers and a density of 0.76, Nirb has a surface gravity of 0.29 g. Nirb is a rich source of titanium and other valuable ores, including fairly sizable deposits of gold and platinum.

Although the Orlamu Theocracy administers most of the mines on Nirb, a handful of independent operations have opened up. While the Theocracy would gladly see these facilities shut down, no politically justifiable means exists to achieve that end. More subtle efforts, such as covert sabotage or economic pressure, remain viable options should the Orlamus choose to employ them

When Hughes and the crew of the *Marathon* first saw this unusual moon, they thought its color might be indicative of life. Such hopes were quickly dispelled, however, when it became apparent that the color was simply the result of tenuous atmosphere of methane and ammonia.

Relatively shallow seas of ammonia cover about 20% of Nirb's surface. To date, scientists have expressed .ittle interest in these. Recently, however, a VoidCorp survey team reported finding some unusual chemical compounds in them. Although they stopped short of claiming that these were in any way alive, VoidCorp representatives stated that the compounds had "unusual characteristics unlike those known elsewhere in the galaxy." VoidCorp has kept additional information under wraps while its executives decide what, if any, potential there might be in these discoveries

Vomisa

At a distance of some 516,000 kilometers, it takes Vomisa 4 days and 18 hours to orbit the massive Redcrown. Although roughly the same size as Nevin, Vomisa has a somewhat lower density (roughly 0.58) and, thus, a surface gravity of only 0.07 g. From Vomisa's surface, Redcrown appears roughly 28 times the size of the full moon on Earth.

The only major settlement on Vomisa is a fledgling mining colony established in 2499 by VoidCorp. Although this facility provides a slow but steady stream of ore (primarily iridium and uranium), it appears to be operating at only about 20% of its capacity. This may be the result of some internal planning on the part of VoidCorp executives. Some market analysis have speculated that the company plans to prove the worth of its claims and then offer mining rights on Vomisa to the highest bidder. Presumably, this would occur only after the VoidCorp gas mine near Redcrown's equator begins full operations in 2502.

Nosredna

The next of Redcrown's moons, Nosredna, circles the planet at a distance of roughly 774,000 kilometers. At this distance, it takes just under 8 days for the moon to trace its entire orbit. A fairly large moon, Nosredna has a diameter of roughly 6,500 kilometers and a density almost identical to that of Earth. This gives it a surface gravity of roughly 0.5 g and makes life fairly comfortable for those living there.

Nosredna has proven to have fairly extensive mineral reserves, but nothing to attract the attention of a major corporation or stellar nation. As such, although this moon is dotted with mining colonies, these are generally small in scale. To be certain, more than one private investor has gotten rich exploiting the reserves of Nosredna, but their finds were hardly noteworthy at the corporate level.

The most impressive geological feature on Nosredna is Fire Lake, which is neither a lake nor composed of fire. Actually, this region is an expanse of bright ejecta with an unusual, but by no means unique, crystal content. When the light from Redcrown, which fills some 9.6° of arc, strikes this region at the right angle (usually at Crownrise and Crownset) it shimmers like a bed of hot coals. This illusion lasts only a few minutes, but countless artists and holographers have made certain that this is the image most people have of Nosredna.

Reiso

Named in memory of *Marathon's* first officer, who died accidentally during the exploration of the Aegis system, Reiso in the largest of Redcrown's moons. With a diameter of just over 8,000 kilometers and a density of 1.04, Reiso has a surface gravity of 0.64 g. It takes 8 days and 19 hours for this moon to circle Redcrown once.

Like Nosredna, Reiso's surface is dotted with independent mining concerns. The largest of these is a speculative venture funded almost wholly by Acrim Industries, owners of Bluefall's most prosperous desalination plant. This marks the first off-world project undertaken by Claris Acrim and many market-watchers predict that it is a burden that drags down this otherwise successful company. Of course, they made similar predictions about the Acrim Desalination Facility that has proven incredibly profitable.

Aocho

Aocho measures roughly 4,750 kilometers in diameter, and with a density of 0.68, it has a surface gravity of just over one-quarter gee. It takes a little more than two weeks (15 days and 21 hours) for Aocho to orbit Redcrown. Aocho lies on its side relative to the plane of its orbit; its axial tilt is just under 80°.

Aocho is perhaps the most inhospitable of Redcrown's moons. A churning shroud of chlorine vapors hangs above the surface of Aocho at a pressure of roughly 0.25 atmospheres. This gives the moon sickly yellow-green color and greatly obscures vision on the surface. Indeed, this blanket completely masks all but the brightest stars and allows only a distorted view of Redcrown itself. Contact with these vapors burns exposed flesh and is especially damaging to eyes or mucous membranes. This atmosphere is a deadly poison.

Some half-dozen industrial facilities are on Aocho. Most of these are dedicated to exploiting the limited mineral resources of the planet. The oldest of these bases is markedly different, however. The t'sa have established a scientific facility on Aocho. No one is certain exactly what type of experiments the t'sa conduct here, but most observers assume the facility pursues some manner of xenochemical research. Regular, coded communications link this facility with the newly established t'sa enclave on Bluefall.

Raeb

The second largest of Redcrown's moons, at 7,997 kilometers in diameter, Raeb is still largely unknown. This globe has an unusually high density (1.06 times that of Earth) and a surface gravity of 0.66 g. Raeb orbits Redcrown at a distance of just over 2.25 million kilometers in 34.5 days. Despite surveys that reveal fairly abundant resources, no major power has stepped forward to claim or even explore Raeb.

The only major manned expedition to Raeb occurred in 2498 when the Regency Survey Ship *Aspirar* descended to the surface with a crew of some 50 scientists. Shortly after the ship began its descent, however, Regency technicians lost all telemetry and voice contact with it. Sensors tracked the craft as it tumbled toward the surface apparently out of control. *Aspirar* struck the surface and exploded in a brilliant fireball without providing any answers about what had gone wrong. Rescue efforts confirmed that no one on the survey

vessel survived and the impact point has been legally closed as a gravesite for the crew.

Avob

The smallest of Redcrown's moons, Avob measures only about 1,550 kilometers in diameter. It has a density of 0.6; its surface gravity is an insignificant 0.08 g. Avob is separated from its primary by some 2.58 million kilometers and has a leisurely orbital period of 42 days and 3 hours. Avob is also considered to be the last of Redcrown's true moons. (The outermost satellite, Lhop, is generally assumed to be a captured planetoid because of its eccentric orbit, unusual composition, and great distance for the gas giant.)

Although Avob is uninhabited, it does host an automated Regency science station. This facility, nicknamed *Hermit* by its operators on Bluefall, continually monitors conditions on Redcrown. The readings supplied by *Hermit* enable scientists to study the gas giant's weather patterns, magnetic field fluctuations, and so on. In addition, an instrument package known as *Junior* keeps a continual watch on the planet's ring system. The Regency has plans to add an automated space traffic control center, but doesn't expect to add that instrumentation before 2505.

Lhop

At an average distance of some 8 million kilometers, Lhop is over three times as far from Redcrown as its nearest neighbor, Avob. It takes this sulfur-shrouded moon some 232.5 days to complete one orbit. Lhop has a density of 0.92 which, combined with a diameter of just under 6,500 kilometers, gives it a surface gravity of 0.46 g. A nitrogen/sulfur atmosphere clings to the planet with a surface air pressure of about 0.25 atmospheres. The atmosphere's high sulfur content is a product of Lhop's heavy geothermal activity, which is itself a result of the planet's fairly elliptical orbit. At its nearest approach to the Jovian, only 6 million kilometers separate the two bodies. At the other extreme, Lhop pulls away to a distance of nearly 10 million kilometers. This causes extreme changes in the tidal force which Redcrown's gravity applies to the moon. The internal heat this generates makes Lhop a regular hotbed of volcanic activity

Lhop has greater concentrations of silicon and carbon than Redcrown's other moons. This and other differences have led many scientists to conclude that Lhop was not formed as a moon of Redcrown. Such considerations would also explain the moon's unusually distended orbit. A few scientists have pointed out that Lhop is actually much more like Bluefall than any other body in the system. Exactly why this might be is a matter of much debate.

There is only one major player in the development of Lhop. For reasons of its own, the Thuidan Empire has constructed a very formidable military base (Vanguard Station) on Redcrown's tenth moon. Although the Thuidan embassy on Bluefall insists that this facility is as much an economic concern as a military facility, close scrutiny doesn't bear out these claims. While Vanguard periodically exports minerals, these are hardly enough to justify the expenses associated with the facility. Most military analysts agree that Vanguard Station was built to allow the Thuidan Empire to control the space around Redcrown in the event of a military crisis.

In addition to the normal tensions associated with a facility of this nature, Vanguard Station has been credited with almost starting a Verge-wide war in 2499. On November 22nd, the VoidCorp transport VCT PM53425 (*Labor of Hercules*) ignored repeated warnings and approached Lhop without authorization. In response to this incursion, Vice Admiral Mendelson, commander of the Vanguard Task Force, ordered the destroyer *Kupfer* to open fire on the intruder. After a warning salvo across the bow, *Kupfer* loosed a pair of *Talon* missiles. These struck *Hercules* amidships and broke the vessel in half. Secondary explosions destroyed the freighter within a minute.

Investigators subsequently determined that *Hercules* was acting under contract to VoidCorp and carried a cargo of supplies intended for the partially completed gas mine. Exactly why it approached Lhop or why it refused to acknowledge contact is unknown. The destruction of this ship caused a rapid increase of tensions in the system. VoidCorp ships were placed on alert, and many believed a fleet action near Redcrown was looming. Quick efforts on the part of Regency and Concord diplomats prevented an armed conflict between the two nations.

Thuidan Empire: Vanguard Task Force

primarily at the Thuidan Empire fortress on Redcrown's tenth moon, Lhop. As of 2502, the main ing vessels:

Ship Name	Description
Van Slyke	*Admiral*-class Cruiser
Sabel	*Broadsword*-class Cruiser
Bizan	*Steel*-class Destroyer
Bronze	*Steel*-class Destroyer

Jetsam

The outermost world in the Aegis system is frigid, forgotten Jetsam. Primarily thought of as a ball of rock with a thin layer of ice spread over it, no effort has ever been made to develop this world economically. Barring some amazing discovery, it seems that this remain the case for the foreseeable future.

Jetsam is a small world, measuring some 4,260 kilometers in diameter. It is unusually heavy, however, with a density of 1.07 and a surface gravity of 0.36 g.

Aegis and Phantasm are over 24 AUs away from Jetsam. At this distance, the feeble light falling on the world seldom warms it to much more than –222 degrees Celsius. It takes Jetsam over a century to complete one orbit as it slowly revolves on its axis every 91.6 hours.

An external shell of water ice, heavily tainted with frozen methane and ammonia, covers the surface of Jetsam. Other trace elements, none of them pleasant, would make processing this material into drinkable water almost unprofitable even if Bluefall did not already supply the system with all the water it could ever need. A wispy atmosphere of methane and ammonia vapors clings to the frozen surface of Jetsam.

There is only one structure on Jetsam, but it is long abandoned. The original colonists had visions of Jetsam becoming the most important shipyard in the Verge. With that goal before them, they began construction of an ambitious facility here. When the system was stripped of all its human inhabitants during the Vanishing in 2452, construction stopped. By the time human beings returned to the system, the dream of a major shipyard on Jetsam was forgotten. All that remains of the facility now is an ice-covered ruin. Initial estimates confirmed that rebuilding the base would require as much effort and money as would starting a new one from scratch. With that report finalized, the project was abandoned.

Planetary Data: Jetsam

Summary Data

[illegible]	Class 4
[illegible]	G1 (0.48 g)
[illegible]	R2 (3.7 rem/wk)
[illegible]	N3 (trace)
[illegible]	P0 (.014 atm)
[illegible]	H0 (–222° C)

Orbital Data

[illegible]	[illegible]
[illegible]	[illegible]
[illegible]	104.3 years
[illegible]	0.0025
[illegible]	72°

Physical Data

[illegible]	4,260 km
[illegible]	Rocky Body
[illegible]	1.07 Terra
[illegible]	0.04 Terra
[illegible]	0.36 g
[illegible]	1

Climate Data

Atmospheric Composition	Methane/Ammonia
Atmospheric Pressure	0.014 atmospheres
Cloud Coverage	100%
Hydrosphere Composition	Not applicable
Hydrosphere Coverage	Not applicable
Average Albedo	0.6055

* Measured from the center of gravity between Aegis and Bluefall

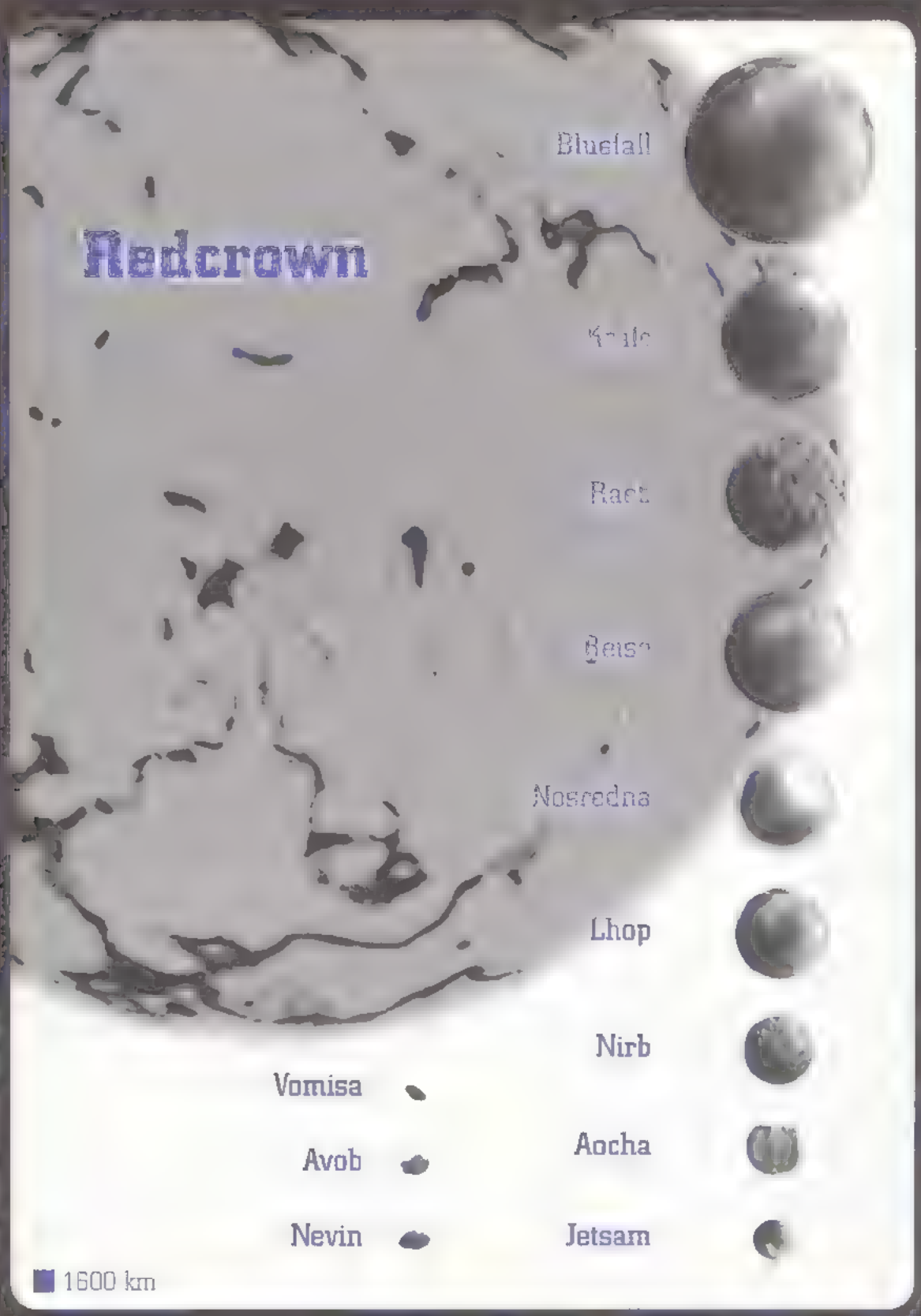
Flotsam

Drifting in an orbit some 13,000 kilometers from the surface of Jetsam is a tiny ball of methane/ammonia ice some 1,200 kilometers in diameter known as Flotsam. It circles Jetsam in about 8 hours, always keeping the same face to its parent planet. Flotsam has a density of only 0.4 standard, so its surface gravity is a feeble 0.04 g.

The surface of Flotsam is a dirty gray-green expanse of methane/ammonia ice. The relatively featureless geography of the moon has been the source of much debate both on the local grid and in the scientific community.

Recent studies conducted by the staff of Research Station Echo, one of only two inhabited compounds on Flotsam, appears to have provided the long sought after answers to these questions, however. Gravity mapping of the moon indicates a concentration of nickel-iron near 20° North latitude. Subsequent investigations have led scientists to believe that this is the site of an asteroid strike. According to their theories, this impact vaporized almost the planet's entire frozen surface, forming a halo of methane and ammonia. In time, this temporary atmosphere cooled and was again drawn to the surface of the moon. When Flotsam's icy crust was restored, all of its earlier topography was erased.

The Regency Stellar Navy maintains a strong presence in the space around Jetsam/Flotsam and Research Station Echo. Indeed, Research Station Echo is technically classed as an RSN vessel (RSNV 0999). In command of this planet-bound vessel is Captain Hilda Simons-Hurst (HI/Orion-Regency/DTO-8), a veteran officer with extensive experience in military intelligence. This is Simons-Hurst's first command assignment, however, and she faces a difficult task in balancing the demands of the base's scientific staff with the pressing needs of the Regency Intelligence Agency.



Relative Sizes of Major Objects

Chapter Three: Bluefall

Often described as the "Jewel of the Verge," Bluefall is a splendid world. It serves as the capital of the Bluefall Regency and is far and away the most visited vacation spot in the sector. But while poets, singers, and artists have extolled the virtues of this gleaming world, the scientific community has tried to find answers to several mysteries upon which the lives of countless millions may depend.

The Ocean World

Bluefall orbits the Aegis/Phantasm pair at a distance of just under 1 AU, making one revolution every 348.8 days. The orbit is very nearly circular, which is somewhat unusual considering the binary nature of the system. This low orbital eccentricity (0.0005) combines with an axial tilt of only 8° to give the planet a very stable climate marked by minimal seasonal changes.

Physically, Bluefall is as much like Earth as the system's primary is like the sun. It has a diameter of 11,452 kilometers and a density of 0.99. These factors combine to give the world a mass of just about 71% that of Earth and a very comfortable surface gravity of only 0.89 g. Geophysical scans of Bluefall reveal that it has a molten iron core, which accounts for the pronounced magnetosphere encircling the planet.

Bluefall's atmosphere is also similar to Earth's; it is composed primarily of molecular nitrogen (about 76%) and oxygen (23%). The remainder of the atmosphere is composed of various other elements. The air pressure on Bluefall is a somewhat light 0.89 atmospheres. Although this can cause fatigue in those who have not become acclimated to it, the slightly higher than standard oxygen content has an invigorating effect which more or less offsets such concerns for most visitors.

The liquid water seas of Bluefall cover fully 98% of its surface. These oceans are rich with life and, in fact, are home to the deepfallen, a sentient species apparently native to the Aegis system.

At any given time, clouds cover some 70% of Bluefall. Although the major wind and weather patterns of the world are well known and have been carefully mapped, severe storms do occasionally threaten the inhabitants. When Aegis's sunspot cycle peaks every 10.5 years, the planet undergoes an intense period of hurricane activity as the solar wind bombards the planet with a magnetic storm. A much lesser storm

cycle has been associated with Phantasm's sunspot activity. When both stars reach their peak at the same time, the climate on Bluefall becomes especially unbalanced.

Tourist magazines delight in pointing out that the average surface temperature on Bluefall is a comfortable 20° Celsius. What they generally omit, however, is any mention of the seasonal variations that, although generally mild, can catch the unwary visitor off guard. The chart below shows the extremes of temperature measured on Bluefall since the planet was first colonized. The first column provides a general description of the region being detailed and the second a rough indication of its latitude. The *summer days* column indicates the highest expected temperate in the region while the *winter nights* column shows the lowest. The *yearly mean* column indicates the average year-round temperature for the region.

Temperature Variations (Celsius)

Planetary Region	Approx. Latitude	Summer Days	Yearly Mean	Winter Nights
Equatorial	below 8°	42°	38°	24°
Tropics	24°	33°	26°	12°
Sub-Temperate	40°	21°	14°	0°
Temperate	56°	10°	2°	−14°
Sub-polar	72°	1°	−10°	−30°
Polar	over 88°	−10°	−22°	−44°

A small polar ice cap appears in on both the north and south poles, but its size changes significantly between summer and winter months. Neither of these caps is based on a landmass, however, so the planetary sea level is little affected by these seasonal changes.

Bluefall is a geologically active world. Its surface is dotted with volcanoes that are constantly reshaping the crust both above and below sea level. They spew huge quantities of sulfur and other greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. By most theories, Bluefall should long ago have succumbed to the same fate as the Earth's closest neighbor, Venus. Bluefall should be a rocky world, baked dry by heat trapped beneath clouds of sulfuric acid vapor.

But this hasn't happened and many scientists are curious why. If scientists can discover and understand these forces, the science of terraforming might be greatly advanced. At the moment, the general consensus gives the credit for keeping Bluefall habitable to two major factors.

The first, as one might guess, are the planet's seas. The vast reserves of water act as massive sponges, absorbing the greenhouse gases almost as quickly as the volcanoes pump them into the atmosphere. This accounts for only a part of the solution, however, as even the seemingly endless seas of Bluefall should have long ago been saturated with contaminants. Indeed, when scientists test the oceans to determine the levels of greenhouse gases they've absorbed, the results are always shockingly low. As yet, scientists do not understand just what mechanism purifies Bluefall's oceans.

According to Rejnald Garcia, Director of Climate Studies for the Regency Meteorological Institute, that something is quite small and quite simple. The seas of Bluefall are rich with a plankton-like creature known as *acrocyclia*. This simple life form rapidly devours the sulfur compounds and other contaminants. As they process these materials, the acrocyclia release oxygen and other gases that have shaped Bluefall's atmosphere and climate. In addition, the petrochemical deposits discovered beneath Bluefall's seas can also be traced to a steady rain of these microscopic creatures as they die and settle to the sea floor.

Early in 2500, however, new evidence was introduced into the debate about Bluefall's origins and evolution. In an article published in the prestigious Regency Journal of Theoretical Studies, Garcia put forth a compelling case for a most disturbing point of view. In the months since its publication, however, more and more of Garcia's peers have embraced his proposal.

According to his examinations of Bluefall, its climate, and its native life forms, this world exists because someone wanted it to exist. Garcia takes steps to explain that he does not mean simply that Bluefall was terraformed. That in itself is not especially noteworthy. The statistically large number of Class I worlds in the Verge have led many scholars to assume that this area was once heavily modified by a Precursor species. Scholars consider the so-called Glassmakers of Mantebron the leading candidates for this role.

Instead, Garcia's team asserts that much of the Aegis system, not just Bluefall, was reshaped to suit the needs of an unknown people. In 2501, the Regency granted Garcia and a handful of other scientists access to representatives of the deepfallen, Bluefall's native sentient species. From this meeting, a number of important conclusions have emerged.

As things stand now, the Bluefall and the Concord officials who have been taken into their confidence have one view of the planet's history. Those who lack ready access to the deepfallen and their seemingly flawless memory of a distant past have other opinions. The sidebar "The Secret History of Aegis" relates modern astrophysical thinking regarding the evolution of the Aegis system and the hand of the Glassmakers. This is, however, only the first part of the story. The rest is in the section detailing the deepfallen and their history.

Islands

In all, the Regency publicly records the existence of 3,081 islands cresting the surface of Bluefall's endless ocean. They also record no fewer than 812 submerged islands that pose some navigational dangers to surface and subsurface craft. Of more than 3,000 islands unaccounted for on maps of Bluefall, over 1,000 remain undeveloped or at least have no officially established colony. This is not to say the islands are barren and empty, but simply that any settlers on them number fewer than 200 and have no established port registered with the Regency.

All registered settlements, regardless of their size, have a number of features in common. They have a source of power, though this varies from archaic windmills or waterwheels to the most advanced power generators imported from the Stellar Ring. There are at least two buildings for living quarters and two more for equipment storage and a general work area or operations center (for communications, defenses, and centralization of any potential work from mining to manufacturing). Finally, each has a hangar or garage for vehicles as well as access to and from the landing areas, whether those are aerial landing pads or docks at the water's edge. Some of the earliest settlements on Bluefall's more remote islands resemble the modular construction of mining outposts, though builders altered the dome construction to fit the climate here.

The cities on Hughes and Regency Islands shown in the Star Drive campaign book are atypical of the major cities, as settlements of that size number fewer than 10 across the whole of Bluefall. In general, there are homesteads of up to 250 people (minimum of 35 people to be considered more than an isolated estate), outposts from 251 to 2,000 people, towns of 2,000 to 15,000 people, cities ranging from 15,000 to 50,000 people, metropolises for any settlements of 50,000 to fewer than a million people, and the megalopolis or island city for more than a million citizens. Across Bluefall, only four sites count as megalopolises, and these cities have grown to engulf their entire islands--Hughes Island, Regency Island, Filtrane, and Saber. The great majority of settlements are coastal.

The islands listed below are just some of the islands found on Bluefall. Each follows this format

Name of Island

Regency Navgrid Position: This provides a quick way to find the island on our Bluefall map. Note that the coordinates given are listed from the lowest left point of the island.
Claims: This identifies which power group controls or claims sovereignty over this landmass as well as the name of the representative leader/ambassador.
Settlements: This lists the cities, towns, outposts, and homesteads on the island, providing sites to visit

Finally, you'll find the brief notes on the island or islands, filling the Gamemaster and players in on how this island can be used for the current campaign or details that set it apart from the norm.

Amena

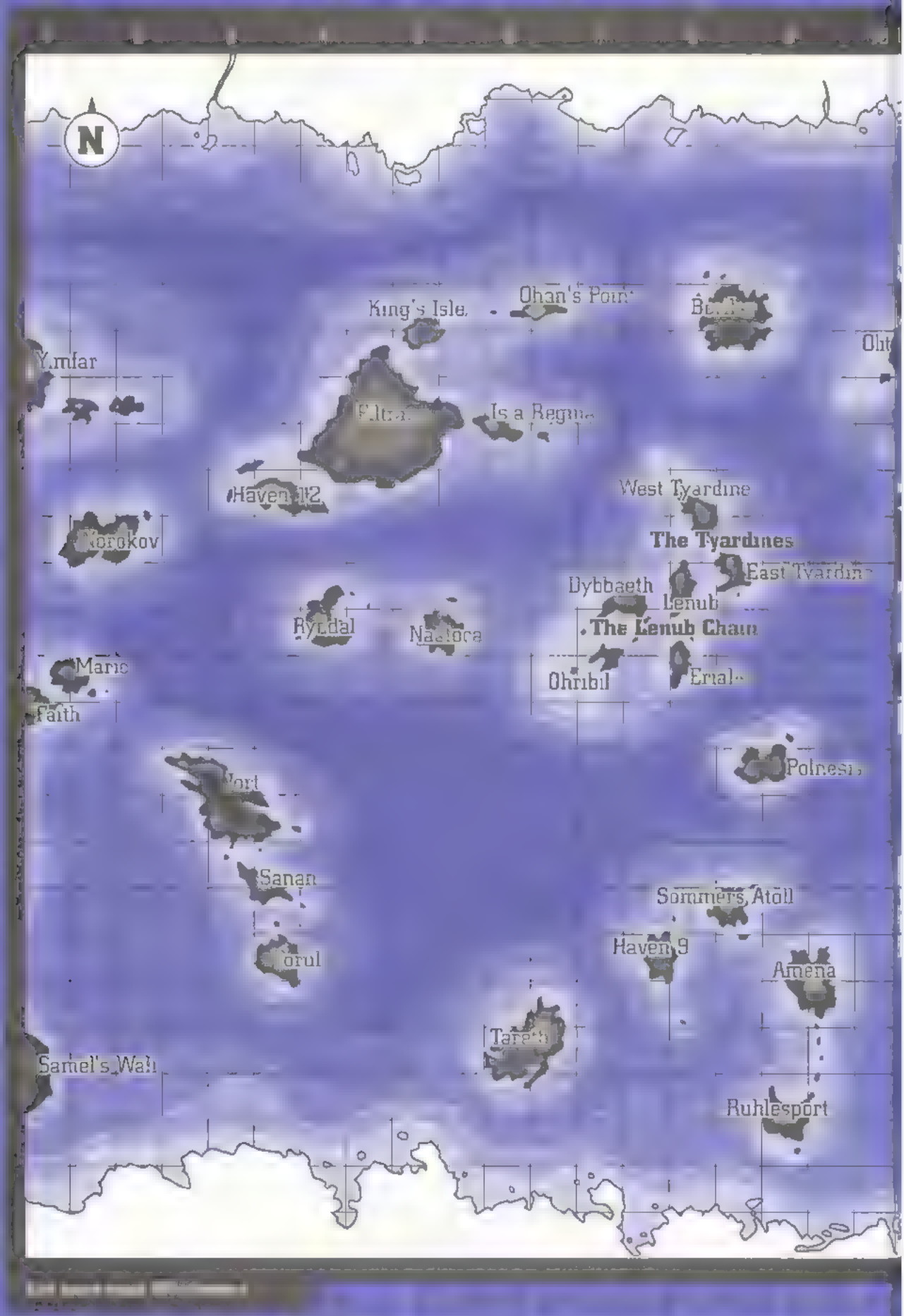
Regency Navgrid Position: U9
Claims: Galactic Concord, Administrator Henry "Hank" Ward (Hm. Concord/DCS-8)
Settlements: Samrael (town), Paral (town), Port Summit (town), four outposts, and 12–20 homesteads

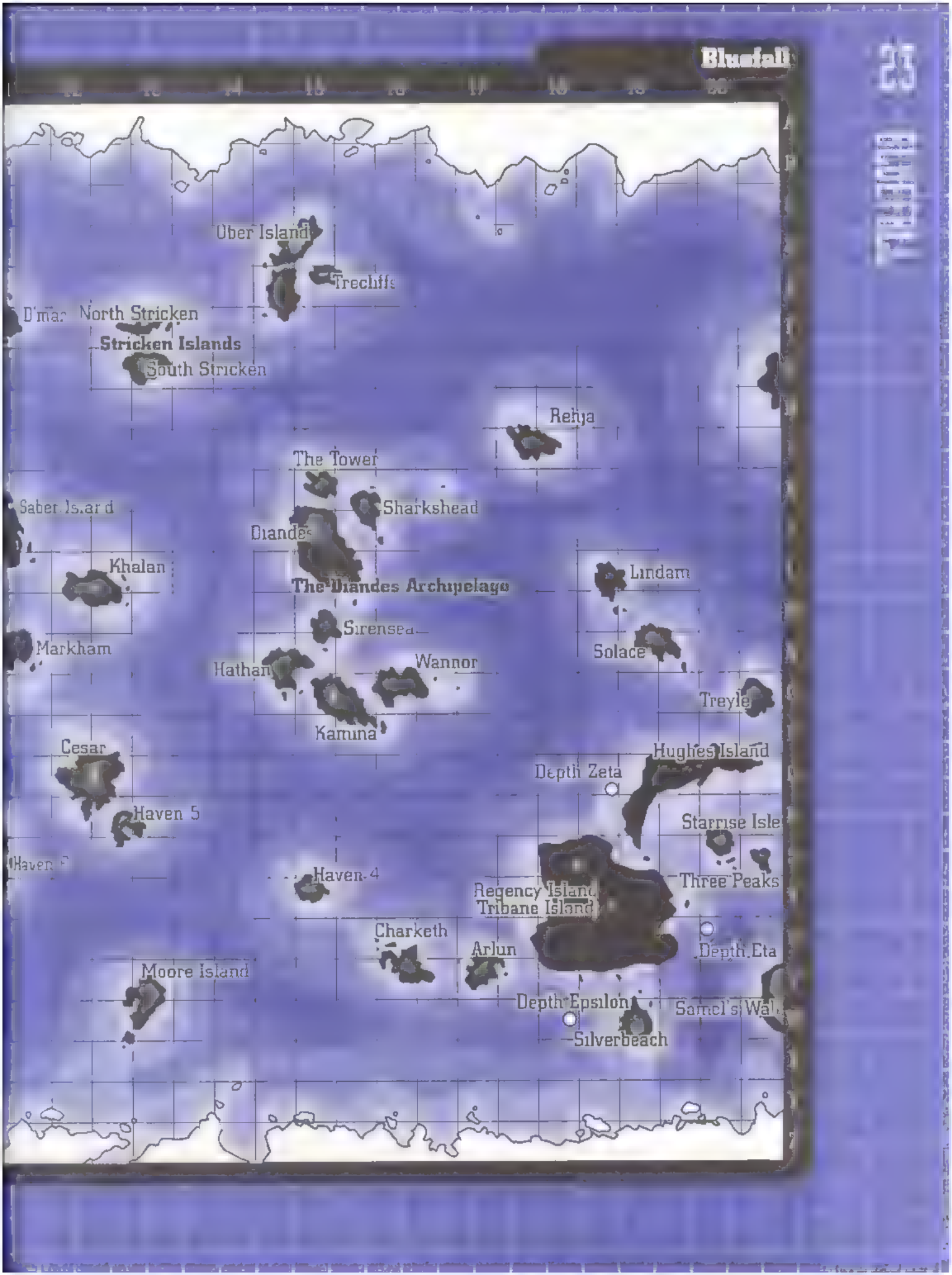
Bluefall's tenth largest island provides homes for many Concord diplomats and their families when they are not on call on the *Lighthouse* or at Dandes. It has a wide beach along its northern coast and its seven outposts and towns all cluster along the north and west. The homesteads are mostly inland and among the highlands and mountains that comprise the southern third of the island.

Berilar

Regency Navgrid Position: F8.5
Claims: The Nariac Domain; Mistress Raelaun (Hf/Nariac/DTD-9)
Settlements: Newlan City (city), one mining outpost, and three fortified military outposts around perimeter of island.

This is the eighth-largest island on Bluefall, though it is sparsely populated. Newlan City is one of the largest science and technical outposts on planet away from Hughes or Regency Islands. It is also one of few places in the Verge that can handle cybernetic repair; all but the most innovative cyber technologies are available here. The mines of Berilar provide settlers with the metals needed for their industries.


N
King's Isle
Ohan's Point
Ymfar
Haven 12
West Tyardine
The Tyardines
Korokov
Dybbaeth
Lenub
The Lenub Chain
Ryldal
Naeloca
Ohribil
Marie
Faith
Polnesia
Sanan
Sommers Atoll
Haven 9
Amena
Samel's Wall
Ruhlesport


Uber Island
Trecliffs
North Stricken
Stricken Islands
South Stricken
Rehja
The Tower
Sharkshead
Khalan
The Diandes Archipelago
Lindam
Sirensea
Markham
Solace
Wannor
Kamina
Treyle
Cesar
Hughes Island
Depth Zeta
Haven 5
Starrise Isle
Haven 4
Three Peaks
Regency Island
Tribane Island
Charketh
Arlun
Depth Eta
Moore Island
Depth Epsilon
Silverbeach

Cesar

Regency Navgrid Position: 012
Claims: The Borealis Republic; Professor Emeritus Aaron Socarta (Xm/Borealis/DTO-15)
Settlements. New Cambar (city/university), Port Naral College (town/college), St. Andrews (outpost/prep school), and Alexandran (outpost/prep school).

With the restoration of the stellar nations to the Verge, a fleet of professors and educators led by Aaron Socarta settled on Bluefall with the *Monitor* in 2498, seeing a desperate need for quality education in the Verge. New Cambar and Port Naral are now considered some of the pre-eminent centers of liberal arts education outside of the Stellar Ring. The Regency has recently hired away numerous assistant professors to establish more credibility for Akkar University on Hughes Island.

Diandes Islands

Regency Navgrid Position: J15 – 016.5
Claims: Control split among four factions. See individual island notes.
Settlements: In total, there are three cities, five towns, twelve outposts, and over two score homesteads scattered among the Diandes island chain. The cities are the capitals on Diandes (Farthen), Kamina (Galtron), and Wannor (Tenslip). Towns are found on Diandes (Quorum), Hathan (Teryl), Kamina (Ixarn), Wannor (Tracl Resort), and Sharkshead (Tamarket). Each island has at least one military and one scientific outpost save for the Tower and Hathan. Those islands hold combined military/science outposts such as Camp Penphal on the Tower and Alliance Base on Hathan.

Diandes (L15): Galactic Concord; Ambassador Oliver Mohan (Hm/Concord/DFA-14). The largest island of the archipelago and the fourth–largest landmass on Bluefall houses the center of the Concord's power.

Hathan (N14.5): Independent. Populated by a mix of Concord and Regency settlers, the 7th largest island in the Diandes Archipelago sees infrequent strife as Vergers and Arrivers clash every few months over land and water use rights as well as their political agendas.

Kamina (015): StarMech Collective; COO Mallory Fletcher (Hl/StarMech/DTO-12). The second-largest island in the Diandes Archipelago provides more than seven small shipyards from which StarMech negotiates shipbuilding for the Regency.

Sharkshead (J15.5): Independent. This island's major colony lies on its southern coast and is fully owned and controlled by Redman-Smith through Milton Industries and its CEO Charles Samarach (Xm/Algemron/DFA-8) as a major shipping port and commodities clearing house. The local

The Secret History of Aegis

harnessed, and put to work. The thin, sulfurous atmosphere that remained after the separation of the

yellow star at a distance of just under 1 AU, was a

canoes labored away, the air became a caustic haze, threatening to block out sunlight and trap the terrible heat of the sun. Before that could happen, how-

but the bonds of gravity held them close. Indeed, they

inhabitable or particularly rich in resources.

their own, evolving without the notice of the planet's masters. This delighted the Glassmakers as, for all their power and knowledge, they loved nothing more than the unknown.

world is called Lhop, the tenth moon of Redcrown.

As so things went for untold years. In time, the world

shark populations have dwindled due to overhunting by Milton executives on pleasure cruises.

Sirensea (M15): Galactic Concord; Deputy Ambassador Nur al-Haq (Hm/Concord/DFA-10). Third largest island in the Diandes Archipelago, it serves as the Deputy Ambassador's residence as well as additional space for conducting Concord matters.

The Tower (J15): Regency; Commander Victor Spiros (Hm/Regency/CS-8). The fifth largest island in the Diandes Archipelago is now little more than a military base with some scientific facilities from which the Regency military develops new weapons or upgrades tech for the orbital defenses. However, there are still traces and some leftover encampments from its pre-Regency days.

Wannor (O16): Independent. Ion Productions of Alaundril claims more than 25% of the fourth largest island in the Diandes Archipelago as one massive corporate resort for shipbuilding executives visiting from Tendril. The remainder of the island has scattered homesteads all along its black sand beaches and the lone city of Tenslip on the western coast

Empire Islands

Regency Navgrid Position: F5 – J4

Claims: Thuldan Empire; Ambassador Andrew Stott (Xm/Thuldan/DFA-23)

Settlements: Filtrane is a megalopolis with over 3 million citizens, while Haven 12 has three cities (Dorado, Grallus, Leon) and one metropolis (Rubicon). Many individual Thuldan estates dot the hillsides of the island

Filtrane Island (I4): The heavily-terraformed and defended center of Thuldan power in the Verge is the second-largest island on Bluefall. All defenses for the four closely linked islands can be controlled from here, providing blanket security for all Thuldan holdings from this one site. More details are in the STAR DRIVE campaign book and in *Threats from Beyond*.

Haven 12 (J3.5): Deputy Ambassador Karen Carson (Xf/Thuldan/DFA-8). This island provides homes for the many lesser diplomats and Thuldans visiting Aegis until they move beyond Bluefall to build their own power bases elsewhere in the Verge.

Isla Regina (H6): Isla Regina has no settlements, as it is entirely a massive estate for Ambassador Stott and honored guests of the Empire. Even when the ambassador is not in residence, there are over 200 servants who live on the premises.

King's Isle (F5): This island has no visible settlement beyond some minor port buildings for vehicle moorings and landings. This island is currently being terraformed like Filtrane to turn it into a hunting preserve for the amusement of Imperial guests and dignitaries. Beneath the rocky hills lie numerous well-defended scientific outposts buried underground and accessible only via submersibles.

Haven 6

Regency Navgrid Position: S11

Claims: Insight; Ambassador Pamela Jackson (Hf/Insight/DTO-17)

Settlements: Seradam (city), Hawkslight (town), Outpost Blue (outpost)

Overseer Jackson is the latest of Insight's ambassadors to Bluefall, as her three predecessors ran afoul of various opposing interests and died mysteriously while vacationing off Haven 6. As a rule, the 56-year-old woman does not leave her compound in Seradam save in grid shadow form to meet with other diplomats. She knows VoidCorp caused the deaths of her predecessors, but neither she nor her Regency allies can prove it.

Hughes Island

Regency Navgrid Position: R19

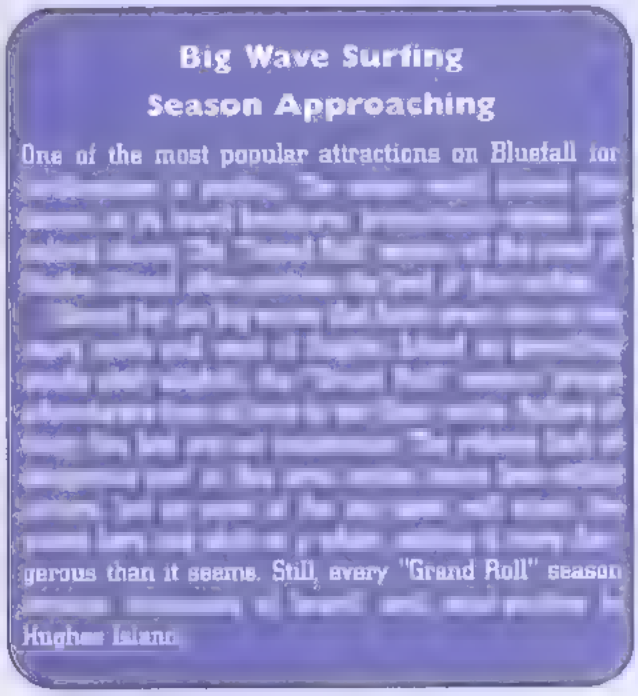
Claims: Regency, Mayor Nicholas "Nick" Martin (Hm/Regency/CS-9) as popular leader in conjunction with Ambassador Colleen McMurphy (Hf/Regency/DFA-8), the Regency's primary contact with other stellar nation ambassadors outside of military officers or Regent Hale.

Settlements: Hughes (island metropolis)

The economic and diplomatic center of Bluefall, Hughes Island is the heart of the Regency as far as any visitors are concerned (as they cannot approach Regency Island) The details on Hughes can be found within the STAR DRIVE campaign book

Big Wave Surfing Season Approaching

One of the most popular attractions on Bluefall for



gerous than it seems. Still, every "Grand Roll" season

Hughes Island

Travel On Bluefall

owners, the fraal Utao (Frn/Orlamu/MW-9) and

people's powered aquascooters to the many tourist directed cruise ships. For natives and visitors alike,

employees, on the other hand, make minimal wages and supplement their incomes with supplying

proper price.

the many islands

port around a home island or to any smaller islands within 20 kilometers of it. Some taxi services take fares

often left to air or sea charter services. While the posh-

like a slightly oversized 20th century yellow cab complete with an external rumble seat and tail fins. To those in the know, Tranyth can also help get folks off planet without official notice

Jort

Regency Navgrid Position: Q3
Claims: Orlamu Theocracy; Ambassador Terise Maloy (Hf/Orlamu/DTO-11 with Psi Talent)
Settlements Port Catedral (metropolis), Basilicus (city), various outposts and homesteads

Jort hosts the largest contingent of mindwalkers, fraal, or weren of all the islands on Bluefall save Regency. While not publicly known, Outpost Phyrian atop Jort's prominent Mount Aldur is a fraal-run mindwalker monastery. Port Catedral is a massive settlement dominating the western half of the island, and its beautiful temples are among the greatest sights to see in the Verge

The Lenub Chain

Regency Navgrid Position: M7–L8
Claims: Regency; Governor Edward Hayward (Hm/Regency/CS-14). (Other than Regent Hale, Governor Hayward is the only Regency leader who rules more than one settlement or island.)
Settlements: Only the major island of Lenub has more than a single community on it, with 15 towns and the cities of Sailspoint and Ryshen. Ohribil and Dybbaeth each host large towns—Port Elizabeth and Bonnis respectively. Erialis now names both the island and the military outpost that rests upon it.

Lenub (L8): From this large island launch some of the Regency's largest fishing fleets, as the island's coast winks with the lights of over 15 fishing towns and the bright spots of Sailspoint on the north and Ryshen to the south. The people are hard working and their grizzled 131-year-old governor exemplifies the rough fisherfolk of Lenub perfectly, the former naval commodore returning home but not leaving the sea.

Erialis (M8): Major Benjamin Quinn (Hm/Orion/CS-11). The few settlers of Haven 8 died of a mysterious plague in 2460, leaving the island to be abandoned and quarantined until the Regency investigated and resettled in 2489. Erialis now plays host to a large outpost and training ground for Regency military recruits.

Ohribil (M7): This small island's main trade comes from its cultivated pearl beds, though its fame grows as a gourmet's destination for the greatest seafood cooking in the Verge

Dybbaeth (L7S): Second-largest island in the Lenub chain. Dybbaeth's main industry comes from coral carving and jewelry making.

Norokov

Regency Navgrid Position: K1.5
Claims: VoidCorp; TX767 201VM/Ambassador Petares Ptaan (Mm/VoidCorp/DTO-13)
Settlements: Colony VCO 9113542/Norokopolis

Most still call this island Norokov, after the island's original Orion governor, though VoidCorp calls it Outpost 9113542. Many things occur within the walled confines of Norokopolis, though Ambassador Petares and his

subordinates are scrupulously careful to prevent all but the most minor of leaks. Despite the usual reticence in dealing with VoidCorp's representatives and the curiosity of a mechalus among the echelons of power, many folks warm to the ambassador.

Ober Island

Regency Navgrid Position: E14.5
Claims: Austrin-Ontis Unlimited; Ambassador Reed Brickwell (Hm/Austrin/DCS-16)
Settlements: Stahn (city) plus a few isolated homesteads or private estates

Despite a notable lack of personal weapons among Bluefall's populace, Austrin's presence here is typical of the stellar nation—their single settlement's primary sites include the embassy and the munitions factories, from which Ambassador Brickwell grows rich in overseeing sales to many rogues and powers throughout the Verge. While only operational in the past 11 months, Stahn Munitions has provided many new weapons and defensive systems to many buyers in the Verge.

Olit

Regency Navgrid Position: G10.5
Claims: Regency; independently ruled by council of five mayors.
Settlements: Olit City (city), Lhenaar (town), Nokash (town), Blackport (town), Cape Tremayre (town), plus seven private estates.

Another of the Regency's islands on Bluefall, Olit has neither the political importance of Regency Island nor the hustle and bustle of Hughes Island—and that suits the residents just fine. Despite its reliance on the petrochemical industry to provide its principal income, Olit's towns and main city are clean and pleasant places. Mostly built after the Vanishing, the buildings represent newer technologies designed to overcome geological tremors as well as extreme weather. Within the last several years, Olit's inhabitants have sought to expand their economic base. As a side benefit of this, the Regency and civic governments have offered tax and subsidy incentives to new businesses.

Polnesia

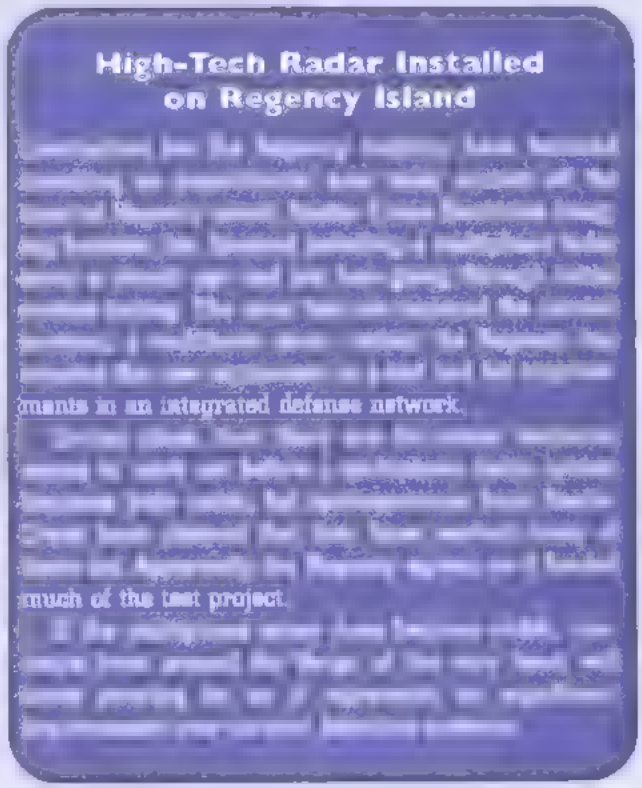
Regency Navgrid Position: P8.5
Claims: Union of Sol; Ambassador/Captain Glen Rassimul (Hm/Solar/DFA-6)
Settlements: Otaheite (capital/town), Taparua (town), Pitcairn (outpost), and over 30 homesteads and individual holdings scattered all along the coast and in the interior of the island.

This island brings the curious sights expected of a Solar settlement. Captain Rassimul's dream transplanted a hodgepodge of 18th Century Polynesian and British sailing cultures together to mask the modern accoutrements and technologies among them. The settlement's great experiment to introduce Earth-born pigs into Bluefall's (or at least Polnesia's) ecosystem has begun, as they released more than 200 pigs into the wilds of this island, hoping to created a wild pig population to further the image of Earth's long-lost south seas cultures.

Regency/Tribane Island

Regency Navgrid Position: U18
Claims: Regency; Regent Christopher Hale (Hm/Regency/DCS-28)
Settlements: Tribane (megalopolis/island city)

Details on the center of Bluefall's leadership can be found in the STAR DRIVE campaign book.



Rehja

Regency Navgrid Position: I17.5
Claims: T'sa *Guardian* Clutch; Ambassador Phanuk Chiaran
Settlements: Only one major settlement—the city of Guardshope—as yet, though there are over 300 small homesteads and clutches of t'sa living together throughout the island.

Rehja has far fewer mountains than many other islands, and it is covered by dense stands of trees (by this planet's standards), which suit the t'sa nicely. The first construction project on this island was a massive hilltop Ch'Nal & K'san Ch'Nak temple visible from more than 5 miles offshore. The temporary shelters, crude wooden huts, survival gear, and altered or scavenged escape pods form the skeleton of the growing city of Guardshope, though the t'sa expect aid to come with the *Guardian's* return to Bluefall with more settlers and raw materials.

Ruhlesport

Regency Navgrid Position: W9
Claims: Rigunmor Star Consortium, Ambassador Charon (Mm/Rigunmor/DCS-19)
Settlements: Ruhlesport (metropolis), Sebar (science out post), and six homesteads/scientific enclaves.

One of the only recognized footholds the Rigunmors have in the Verge is this small island located near Bluefall's southern icecap. Despite its latitude, it is a bustling entrepôt. Many goods move through Ruhlesport, shipped to other destinations on Bluefall. In addition to this dirtside facility, the Rigunmors have also leased space on Nectaris Orbital Station, through which they move trade goods through the Verge.

Ryddal

Regency Navgrid Position: M4
Claims: Hatire Community; Brother Paulus (Hm/Hatire/MW-10)
Settlements: Mearcol (capital/town), and over four dozen homesteads and religious outposts/abbeys.

Brother Paulus managed to wrest quite a prize when he convinced Regency officials to grant to the Community the lease for Ryddal. Situated right near the equator and protected from some of the more severe weather by the proximity of neighbors, Ryddal is quite a peaceful place. Brother Paulus and his followers live here simply, bothering no one

Saber

Regency Navgrid Position: K11
Claims: Orion League, Ambassador Olivia Lorne (Hf/Orion/DFA-7)
Settlements: Saber (megalopolis/island city)

Saber's status as a developing megalopolis makes it unique. While the settlement grows apace and does cover the entire island, undeveloped areas of trees and beaches make for some idyllic parks which the Orions use as a selling point over the totally developed Hughes Island.

Samel's Wall

Regency Navgrid Position: W1
Claims: Independent
Settlements: Samelsport (town), Outposts C1 through C9 (military posts along mountain ridge

Samel's Wall refers to the high cliffs and mountains that split the island in two. The cliffs loom over the eastern lagoon, which is the only safe approach by water.

Tareth

Regency Navgrid Position: V6
Claims: Regency settlers, independently governed but protected.
Settlements: Over 50 individual homesteads, farms, or private estates.

Tareth is a relatively new island, only recently approved for settlement. It has little but cottage industry thus far, but residents have already drawn up business plans for its growth. The residents deal with internal matters through direct vote. Political watchers on Bluefall have noticed the interest which the Regency government takes in the management of Tareth. Some believe that Regent Hale might even use Tareth's success as a means to introduce democratic government to Bluefall in the measured way he prefers.

Yimfar

Regency Navgrid Position: G1
Claims: Independently ruled Regency settlers
Settlements: Cape Yimfar (city), Riversend (town), and a dozen homesteads.

Yimfar has developed into an impressive economic success story. Its principal industries center around aquaculture: hydroponics and fishing. But it also has an active petrochemical industry, as well as a growing share of the shipbuilding market. Civic government is a sort of representative oligarchy, but the real power lies with the businesses

Other Islands of Bluefall

While there are hundreds more islands on Bluefall, naming or identifying their unique properties causes many of them to blur together confusingly. Below are a number of identifiable islands with plots or features that make them useful for sparking new campaign ideas for the Gamemasters.

D'mar (F11): This island is wholly owned by Visions of Divinity Inc, a private holoevangelical group. Of interest to the RIA and CIB are the ties VDI has with Celestial Entertainment Ltd. (and through it, the Coreano crime family of the Stellar Ring).

Khalan (L12): This sister island to Saber provides many lavish estates for the comfort of Orion League business leaders and diplomats.

Moore Island (V13): While control over this island and its "ownership" continue to be fought in Concord and Regency courts, Paradise Tours (based out of Alaundril) still offers thrill-seeking guests the opportunity for skin diving among the psionic Moore's sharks.

Naatoca (M5.5): This place is fast becoming known as Vergers' Island by the media and diplomats of Old Space. This restricted community allows no immigration or even visitation by Arrivers. Only those born & bred in the Verge can trade or live here among the two cities at either end of the island or the three towns between them. Despite obvious disparities in power, the Naatocan defensive fleet of seven patrol boats often challenges far larger Thuldan

The Haven Islands

ing little behind.

Havens, despite their current names.

Haven 1	Starrise
Haven 2	Hughes
Haven 3	Treyle
Haven 4	This name persists as the few settlers and fishermen have little interest in naming their tiny fishing port, let alone renaming their island.
Haven 5	The few local settlers can't seem to agree on a name for the island, so it remains Haven 5 for now
Haven 6	Over the past few years since the end of [illegible] (insight has renamed this island no fewer than seventeen times, each one more [illegible] guides retain Haven 6 as the island title.
Haven 7	East Tyardine
Haven 8	Straits
Haven 9	The island's nine homesteader colonies [illegible] the Haven title.
Haven 10	Maria
Haven 11	Faith
Haven 12	One of the Empire Islands, the Thuldan government has not yet changed its name

Islands of Bluefall	Grid	Claimed by
Arkon	V17	Independent
Berliar	F8.5	Nariac Domain
Charketh	V16	Independent
Depth Epsilon	W18	Regency
Depth Eta	U20	Regency
Depth Zeta	Q19	Regency
Dimar	F11	Visions of Divinity Inc.
Dybbuuth	L7.5	Regency
East Tyardine	K8.5	Independent
Eriallo	M8	Regency
		settlers, though not sovereign territory
Filtrano		Thuldan Empire
Hethar		Galactic Concord & Regency settlers
Haven 4		Independent
		Independent
		Insight
		Independent
		Thuldan Empire
		Regency
		Thuldan Empire
		Orlamu Theocracy
		StarMech Collective
		Orion League
		Thuldan Empire
		Regency
		Independent
		Still claimed by Orion settlers, though not sovereign territory
		Independent
		Paradise Tours [an] Alaundril consortium

Islands of Bluefall	Grid	Claimed by
Nastoc		Independent
Norokov	K1.5	VoidCorp
North Stricken	F13	Nariac Domain
Ober	E14.5	Austrin Ortis Unlimited
Ohan's Point	F6.5	Independent
Ohriol	M7	Regency
Olit	G10.5	Regency
Regency	U18	Regency
Rehja	I17.5	Tsa of *Guardian* Clutch
Ruhlesport		Rigunmor Star Consortium
Sabor	K12	Orion League
Samel's Wall	W1	Independent
Sharkshead		Regency
Silverbeach		Independent
Sirenoss		Galactic Concord
Solace		Engis Unlimited
Sommers Atoll		Independent
South Stricken		Independent
Starrise Isle		Regency / Orion League settlers
Tareth		Regency
The Tower		Regency
Three Peaks		Regency & Orion settlers
Torul	T3.5	Independent
Trecliffs	E15	Independent
Treyle	O20.5	Still claimed by Orion settlers, though not sovereign territory
Wannor		Independent
West Tyardine		Independent
Yimlar		Regency

cruisers violating their self-imposed 6-mile territorial boundaries.

Solace (N19): Engis Unlimited owns this private island as well as a large controlling interest in the Verge Merchants League. Solace holds 30 elaborate estates for rent by the month, as well as 10 fully developed resorts for more public use. Only 10% of the island is left for living space for the workers/natives, as all other territory is given over to customers.

Sommers Atoll (S8.5) High mountainous terrain surrounds a placid lagoon with spectacular waterfalls. The mountains and hills are dotted with monasteries and temples of numerous faiths, including a Buddhist temple. The preponderance of places of worship lead many to nickname this place Temple Isle.

Starrise Isle (S20): Site of one of the surviving colonies (Haven 1) between the Vanishing & rise of the Regency; renamed such by the colonists who saw the starrise of Hale's armada into the system via telescopes. It houses a science outpost & one of few surface control sites for orbital defense platforms.

Steadfast Islands (O20.5 – N1.5): This trio of islands comprised some of the most stable settlements to survive between the Vanishing and the rise of the Regency. In 2488, the islands were named Treyle, Faith, and Marie, posthumously honoring the kindly governor, his wife, and their living daughter who helped keep the colonies alive through many hard times. While not considered sovereign land like the embassies, this trio of islands falls under Orion League control, with the honorable Marie Treyle-Samson acting as governor of the Steadfasts.

Top 25 Islands of Bluefall (Ranked by size)

1	[illegible]	[illegible] sq. mi.
2	Filtrana Island	989,407 sq. mi.
3	Hughes Island	509,128 sq. mi.
4	Diandes	479,691 sq. mi.
5	[illegible]	[illegible] sq. mi.
6	Ober Island	421,512 sq. mi.
7	Saber Island	358,008 sq. mi.
8	[illegible]	[illegible] sq. mi.
9	[illegible]	309,286 sq. mi.
10	[illegible]	267,300 sq. mi.
11	[illegible]	213,582 sq. mi.
12	[illegible]	187,401 sq. mi.
13	[illegible]	174,821 sq. mi.
14	[illegible]	164,922 sq. mi.
15	Yunfar	161,380 sq. mi.
16	Polnesia	141,499 sq. mi.
17	Ryddal	137,727 sq. mi.
18	Norokov	131,503 sq. mi.
19	Lenub	129,333 sq. mi.
20	Haven 6	117,823 sq. mi.
21	Ruhlesport	101,297 sq. mi.
22	Samel's Wall	94,429 sq. mi.
23	Sirensea	86,502 sq. mi.
24	Rehja	81,079 sq. mi.
25	Wannor	73,214 sq. mi.

The Stricken Islands (F/G13): North and South Stricken are controlled by the Nariac Domain, though there are a number of independent settlements on South Stricken Island that do not owe allegiance to this stellar nation or its colonists.

Claims and Settlements by Organization

Stellar Nation / Consortium	*Claimed or Settled Island*	NavGrid
Austrin-Ontis Unlimited	Ober Island	E14.5
Borealis Republic	Cesar	O12
Galactic Concord	Amena	U9
Galactic Concord	Diandes	L15
Galactic Concord	Sirensea	[illegible]
Hatire Community	Ryddal	[illegible]
Insight	Haven 6	[illegible]
Nariac Domain	Berlar	[illegible]
Nariac Domain	North Stricken	[illegible]
Orion League	Khalan	[illegible]
Orion League	Saber	[illegible]
Orlamu Theocracy	Jort	[illegible]
Regency	Depth Epsilon	[illegible]
Regency	Depth Eta	[illegible]
Regency	Depth Zeta	[illegible]
Regency	Dybbaeth	[illegible]
Regency	Erisia	[illegible]
Regency	Hughes	[illegible]
Regency	Lenub	[illegible]
Regency	Ohriol	[illegible]
Regency	Olit	[illegible]
Regency	Regency	[illegible]
Regency	Sharkshead	[illegible]
Regency	Tareth	[illegible]
Regency	The Tower	[illegible]
Regency	Yunfar	[illegible]
Regency & Galactic Concord settlers	Nathan	[illegible]
Regency/Orion League settlers	Faith	[illegible]
Regency/Orion League settlers	Mara	[illegible]
Regency/Orion League settlers	Starrise Isle	[illegible]
Regency/Orion League settlers	Three Peaks	[illegible]
Regency/Orion League settlers	Treyla	[illegible]
Rigunmar Star Consortium	Ruhlesport	[illegible]
StarMech Collective	Kamina	[illegible]
Thuldan Empire	Filtrana	[illegible]
Thuldan Empire	Haven 12	[illegible]
Thuldan Empire	Isla Regina	[illegible]
Thuldan Empire	King's Isle	[illegible]
Union of So	Polnesia	[illegible]
VoidCorp	Norokov	[illegible]
Tea of *Guardian* Clutch	Rehja	[illegible]
Engis Unlimited	Solace	[illegible]
Paradise Tours (an Alaundral consortium	Moore	[illegible]
Visions of Divinity Inc	Omar	[illegible]

Powers of Bluefall

Stellar Nation / Group	Primary Island	Ambassador / Leader / Primary Representative	Plots / Beings-On
		Ambassador Petares Ptaan	AsGrid family) & linked to CIB

Aegis System Moon	Aegis System Planet	Claimed	Settlements?
			mines
Vamusa	Redcrown	VoidCorp	Mining facil
Ancho	Redcrown	None	Industrial facilities (indep) ex science lab
Reeb	Redcrown	Unknown	Unknown
Flotsam	Jetsam	None	Research Station Echo, one other compound

Chapter Four: Ecology of Bluefall

When most people think of the oceans of Bluefall, they picture the enigmatic deepfallen moving gracefully through a serene blue sea. There are, of course, countless other species of plants and animals in the oceans, many of which remain undiscovered by humankind.

The oceans of Bluefall are not unlike those of Earth and other Class 1 worlds. The highest salinity of the water is about 30 parts per thousand in the coastal waters of the equatorial islands. This compares to some 45 parts per thousand in the Red Sea on Earth. On the average, however, the oceans of Bluefall are less salty than those of Earth, averaging about 25 parts per thousand (as opposed to Terra's own 35 parts per thousand). The salts dissolved in these waters are positive ions of sodium, magnesium, calcium, and potassium and negative ions of various chlorides and sulfates. The oceans are also tainted with trace metals that are very important to Bluefall's aquatic life, as are the free atoms of carbon, nitrogen, phosphorus, and oxygen suspended in the water.

Ocean Regions

It is easier to study the oceans of Bluefall by isolating various aquatic biomes. Although these blend into one another, they are generally studied as isolated regions.

Coastal Waters

The islands to which humankind clings are little more than afterthoughts on the surface of Bluefall. Yet a thriving ecology has developed in the shallow warm waters just off the coasts of these islands.

While many think of "coastal waters" as those associated with the gradually sloping of the continental shelves, this is not the case on Bluefall. All of the surface land one finds here is the result of volcanic activity. As such, the coastal waters are relatively narrow bands that cling to the sides of the islands like people cling to their surfaces. These drop off rapidly, seldom extending more than half the diameter of the island itself.

The coastal waters of Bluefall are rich in microscopic life. These include a wide variety of algae, plankton, and diatoms. The most common form of microscopic life in the coastal

waters (as well as in the open ocean) is a yellow-white creature known as swimmer's yeast. Many of the larger creatures that live in the coastal waters feed upon swimmer's yeast and other microscopic plants and animals.

Vast forests of seaweed cling to the sides of these steep slopes, reaching their swaying tendrils toward the life-giving rays of the sun. Schools of small fish dart to and fro, hoping to avoid the solitary hunters like the deadly crushjaw or kelp viper.

The floor of the ocean here is often covered with mollusks, bivalves, and similar creatures. The largest of these is the Drummond's snail, a carnivorous mollusk like creature nearly two meters long that sustains itself by snaring passing fish (and the occasional swimmer) with its barbed tendrils.

Despite the valiant efforts of the Regency Ecological Service, the tourism industry is taking its toll on the planet's coastal waters. Although strict regulations govern the commercial tourism industry, the Ecological Service can do little to reign in the pollution and environmental damage inflicted by individuals as they dive in these shallow waters. Although stiff fines and even imprisonment keeps damage to a minimum, these are ecologically sensitive areas.

Coral Shelves

All of Bluefall's islands are volcanic in origin. This means that geothermal sulfur vents dot the waters around them. These provide an outstanding growth medium in which native corals not only grow, but also flourish. As such, a coral shelf girds each of the major islands.

The coral shelves of Bluefall are without peer anywhere in human space. Although they are similar to terrestrial reefs, they are much larger. The Hughes Island Coral Shelf, for example, is fully the size of Australia on Earth.

The polyps that create Bluefall's coral shelves are similar to their terrestrial cousins in many ways. There are several species, each grouped according to the shape of the exoskeleton they created. The globular corals, for example, create spherical shells, while the tubular corals encase themselves in pipe-like exoskeletons. Most of Bluefall's corals have stinger cells similar to those found in terrestrial jellyfish.

In addition to the minute polyps, the shelves support a great array of anemones, sponges, and shellfish. There are also hundreds of species of fish, eels, and jellyfish in these regions. While most of these creatures pose no threat to human divers, animals like the octopus-like noose fish and swift shock angular have occasionally injured or even killed the unwary.

Ocean Surface

Moving away from the islands and coral shelves, we come to the vast expanse of the ocean proper. The top layer of this global sea, where the bright rays of Aegis and Phantasm provide light and warmth, is filled with a wide variety of fish and similar creatures.

Like the coastal waters, the ocean surface is filled with plankton, diatoms, and algae. In addition, island-masses of seaweed, made buoyant by gas bladders, drift on the currents, streams, and drifts of the sea. These form the bottom of a complex food chain as diverse and complicated as any known to humankind.

Dolphins

Introduced into this biosphere with the initial Orion [illegible] oceans of Bluefall. Curiously enough, dolphins have actually been reported to have performed complex [illegible] ther wonder if the deepfallen have something to do with these radical advancements in cetacean evolution.

Many small and medium-sized fish swim through this region, warming themselves in the light and feeding on the rich broth of microorganisms. This is also the hunting ground of the Moore's shark, one of Bluefall's most dangerous predators.

Perhaps the most unusual creature on the surface of Bluefall's oceans is the snare fisher. This creature is a large, amoeba like mass of tissue that drifts about on the waters. When a flying creature passes overhead, the snare fisher spits out a sticky tendril and drags it down to be digested in a large vacuole.

Commercial fishing is common on the ocean surface, with many large schools of fish easily harvested by trawlers. The most common prey for these large craft are the tuna like fat fish and slender Brandon's kite. Recreational fishing craft also prowl the waters, giving tourists a chance to hook a red fin, scarlet runner, or jumper fish for themselves.

Middle Ocean

The middle ocean lies between the surface and the eternal night of the deep ocean. In these twilight regions where only the most diffuse light filters through, numerous species of fish swim about in schools or as solitary hunters. These range from the finger-sized silver, blue, or red darters to the ten-meter long dodecapus.

This region is dominated by carnivorous hunters seeking to devour others before being eaten themselves. On Bluefall, as on Earth and most other worlds with large oceans, most fish or fish-like creatures are carnivorous.

This region is fairly well explored, for the majority of the Regency Undersea Navy spends its time here. Whether on military missions or voyages of discovery, these craft allow the Regency to make detailed charts of ocean currents, vertical conduction, and fish populations.

Deep Ocean

The last region of Bluefall's seas is the deep ocean, a realm of eternal darkness. Although this area is home to a great

diversity of creatures, it is best known as the habitat of the deepfallen and their organic cities.

The deepfallen number among their neighbors a large number of strange and exotic creatures, all adapted to survive in extreme cold and at incredible pressure. Like their cousins in the middle ocean, the vast majority of these are carnivores. These include the bulbous strobe fish, which uses a blinding flash of light to stun its prey or defend itself, and the bony pincushion known as the porcupine ray.

In addition to these fish, however, the ocean floor is home to its own unusual array of creatures. Many of these cluster around volcanic smokers similar to those found on the slopes of the planet's islands. Unlike those creatures, which derive benefits from photosynthesis as well as the out-gassing of the geothermal vents, life on the ocean bottom is completely dependent upon energy from deep beneath the surface to survive.

Very few humans have ever explored this region. The average depth here is over 15 kilometers, so the sheer weight of the water above crushes all but the most advanced submersibles. In addition, the Regency government steers away the curious from these depths. The deep ocean is home to the deepfallen, and the Bluefall Regency, at least for the time being, has mandated that they be left in peace.

Other Regions

The small surface area of dry land on Bluefall has limited the number and variety of land animals on the planet. For similar reasons, there are very few flying species on the planet. Because of this, scientists on Bluefall generally disregard the normal biome classifications when discussing the non-aquatic regions of the planet. In general, only three other important regions exist on the planet.

Islands

The islands of Bluefall have virtually nothing akin to real soil, which makes them especially inhospitable to plants of all kinds, so only the most rugged vegetation survives there. Despite this, some of the oceanic species of plants have managed to spread onto the shores, although no natural vegetation more advanced than the fern-like emerald fronds and sapwillows develop. Some of these plants produce primitive blossoms, but there are few true flowering plants anywhere on the surface land. In addition, true trees do not exist on Bluefall, at least not like the kinds that grow of Earth. Shorter scrub trees are common enough, however. Velvet shag, a dense form of moss, clings to most exposed rocks, giving undeveloped land a soft, almost grassy texture.

The development of animal life has been similarly retarded on Bluefall. Indeed, none of the higher land-dwelling life forms can be found on this planet. There are no birds or mammals and only a few species of primitive lizard (of which the most famous is the dangerous sunsoarer). Early settlers on Bluefall were pleased to discover that the planet is almost completely lacking in insects.

Aerial

There are no true birds on Bluefall. There are, however, a few species of flying animals that are worthy of note. As with the land animals, however, these fliers all have close ties to the sea.

The largest and most dangerous of Bluefall's half-dozen or so winged animals is the sunsoarer. Although originally mistaken for a bird, this creature is actually a lizard. In and of itself, this is a rare distinction, placing the sunsoarer at the top of both the food chain and the evolutionary ladder. A smaller cousin of this animal, dubbed the Baldur's Hawk, glides but lacks the stronger flying abilities of the more powerful sunsoarer.

Other species worthy of mention here are the twenty or so species of floaters. Although these creatures are fish, they are commonly encountered above the water. Whenever they are frightened or startled, they inflate their oversized swim bladders with hydrogen and pop out of the water to hang in the air. Although they lack any means of maneuvering when airborne, this unusual ability enables them to escape from dangerous predators. Most floaters can remain aloft for between ten and fifteen minutes before they are forced back into the sea to avoid asphyxiation. It is also worth mentioning that the hydrogen in a floater's swim bladder is highly explosive, so an energy weapon discharged at one of these creatures can bring about a brilliant fireball.

Polar Ice

The last of the planet's non-aquatic environments are its polar ice caps. Neither pole has any land mass associated with it, so the seasonal changes in the size of the ice caps is quite severe. Although neither ever truly vanishes, they are often reduced to a fraction of their winter size when summer warms them.

Even here, however, the observer finds tenacious forms of life clinging to what are, in essence, giant icebergs. For the most part, these are limited to small slugs and other soft-bodied worms that burrow through the ice in search of mineral deposits. These animals resist the cold of their surroundings thanks to natural internal furnaces that not only keep them warm but also soften the dense sea ice and facilitate their burrowing.

The Deepfallen

Since first contact, the deepfallen have been a mystery to the scientific community of Bluefall. In recent months, however, a disturbing picture has emerged about these unusual sentients and their place in the universe.

Much of the information that follows has been assembled from conversations with a deepfallen representative commonly referred to as Tethys. This name, from Terran mythology, is not his own, but he has readily accepted it and uses it freely when dealing with the diplomatic staff at Depth Epsilon. Game statistics for Tethys appear in the sidebar accompanying this text.

Physiology

In a most general sense, the deepfallen are humanoid. They are bipedal, with long, willowy limbs and slender, fragile-looking bodies. Their heads are angular, with bulbous, black eyes that remind one of the fraal. A backswept frill extends from the forehead; many scientists believe this acts as something of an antenna or amplifier for their natural psionic talents.

The deepfallen extract oxygen from a very versatile gill-like organ that functions both in and out of water. In the latter case, however, the organ is far less efficient, so a deepfallen can survive outside of the sea for only 24 hours. After this time, they must submerge themselves to restore the oxygen levels in their bodies to normal. This takes about 24 hours, after which time the deepfallen may again return to the surface world.

Perhaps the most puzzling thing about the deepfallen is their physiology. No theory of aquatic evolution allows for the existence of such a humanoid species in a deep-water environment. Even devolved species, like the dolphins of Earth or seamares of Beta Hydri, are adapted to a marine environment. Even if there were nothing else mysterious about the deepfallen, this would be more than enough to draw the attention of xenologists throughout human space. It isn't difficult to understand why the Regency of Bluefall has suspected since the day they encountered the deepfallen that they are not a naturally evolved species.

This impossible evolution, however, is only the first of many riddles about the deepfallen. The physical structure of this unique species allows them to exist comfortably at depths where water pressure would crush an unprotected human being to death long before he could drown. At the same time, however, their bodies adapt to the relatively insignificant pressures at the surface (or even on land.), where other deep water creatures would burst from their own internal pressure. While it is remotely possible that such adaptations could occur naturally, no other species known to humanity can survive in such a wide range of conditions.

Further, the deepfallen appear to have no kindred species. While humanity has clear genetic ties to the other primates of Terra, the deepfallen appear to be unique among the denizens of Bluefall's oceans. Efforts to match the genetic structure of the deepfallen to creatures in nearby systems have proven equally futile. Indeed, the deepfallen appear to have no relatives anywhere in known space.

All this evidence supports the theory that the deepfallen are nothing less than a test tube species, designed and introduced into the galaxy wholly from scratch. A genetic engineering project of this scope remains far beyond the reach of human scientists. Exactly how the deepfallen became the species they are today is a question much debated in academic circles and on the Grid. While many theories have

been put forward, some of which are very close to the truth. Only the highest-ranking officials in the Regency government and, through them, the leaders of the Galactic Concord in the Verge know the actual history of the deepfallen.

The various stellar nations represented on Bluefall, especially the embassies of the Thuldan Empire and Orlamu Theocracy, continually seek to put together the pieces of this convoluted puzzle. They suspect, quite rightly, that the Regency of Bluefall, which has had by far the most contact with the deepfallen, knows more than they are willing to admit. What they don't realize, however, is the sheer magnitude of the secrets the deepfallen have shared with their Regency counterparts.

Psychology

In many cases, xenopsychologists learn a great deal about an alien species through the study of their language. The war-like weren, for example, have a seemingly countless number of words for *knife* while the fraal have as many terms for *dream*. These tools are utterly useless when attempting understand the deepfallen, however, for they appear to rely wholly on telepathic contact for communication with one another.

They also "speak" with human beings through mental links, although humans "hear" the words of the deepfallen in what sounds like a human voice. When this happens, the language patterns used by the deepfallen are those most familiar to the person encountered. Indeed, many humans who have "spoken" with the deepfallen report hearing their own voices coming back to them. Obviously, such exchanges offer little insight into the alien thought processes, however, as such conversations reflect the linguistic prejudices of the other participants in the conversation, not the deepfallen themselves.

To date, Regency scholars have had little chance to undertake an in-depth psychological evaluation of the deepfallen. Although human scientists have had a chance to dissect a pair of deepfallen bodies, these operations appear to have raised as many questions as they answered. Still, even such limited contact with these aliens has allowed for a basic understanding of their mental processes. These creatures are as alien in mind as they are in body.

Most of the people who have had close contact with the deepfallen describe them as a peaceful people. As Regency officials are quick to point out, there has never been a reliable report of a hostile encounter with the deepfallen. While some read this as an indication that they have a deeply seated pacifism, others credit the matter either to good luck or restraint on the part of the deepfallen. Efforts to provoke some manner of emotional response from deepfallen diplomats at the Depth Epsilon enclave have shed no light on this matter. After a time, it appears, the typical member of this species responds to aggressive or confrontational behavior with a shiver (the deepfallen equivalent to a shrug) and an end to the discussion.

In rare cases of an attack against a deepfallen, the aliens have defended themselves—usually with psionic powers or other nonlethal methods. In no case, however, is there any evidence of excessive force or cruelty on the part of the aliens. They use no weapons that employ lethal force.

Deepfallen Ecological Data

[illegible]	Series 1
[illegible]	Class 1
[illegible]	G2/R1/A2/P3/H2
[illegible]	Abyssal plain, marine trenches
Encounter Chance:	Possible
Group Size:	4–48 (4d12)
Organization:	Advanced urbanized society
Niche:	Omnivore with active cultivation
Intelligence:	Sentient, telepathic

Perhaps the most interesting aspects of deepfallen psychology are tied to their understanding of *self* and *community*. While most sentient species acknowledge at least a modicum of personal responsibility for the good of society as a whole, the deepfallen carry this belief to its extreme. All indications are that the concept of individuality is either nonexistent or repressed in their society.

The most likely explanation for this is tied to the natural telepathy of the deepfallen. Apparently, they are constantly aware of other members of their species in the area. Thus, it is impossible for one of these creatures to sneak up on another as both are naturally aware of the other's presence. The range of this sensitivity varies, but seems to average around half a kilometer or so.

Social Structure

In human terms, the closest counterpart to deepfallen culture appears to be the theoretical ideal of communism. Why the deepfallen maintain a society in which all individuals contribute what they can to the whole of society is a subject of much debate among human scholars. Of course, the existence of a natural psychic rapport between the deepfallen is certainly an important factor. While the deepfallen fall short of having an insect-like hive mind, they are intertwined in a way human beings do not fully understand. Because of their own psychic sensitivity the fraal understand this better, but even they are at a loss to define it.

The deepfallen speak of central ruling body that makes decisions for the race as a whole. They refer to this group as *the Collective*, but give little or no information about how they select its members or what system of checks might ensure fairness. Careful analysis of conversations with Tethys and other deepfallen representatives have led many to believe that each of the dozen or so deepfallen cities has its own Collective.

Some cultural specialists, especially the noted fraal xenopsionicist Amir ja Singe, suggest that the deepfallen Collectives

are not actual assemblies. Rather, they believe the deepfallen reach decisions by linking their minds into a greater whole. Such a group consciousness would explain the apparent lack of dissent in deepfallen society.

Orbital scans have pinpointed no fewer than a dozen deepfallen cities. These are scattered evenly around the planet and appear to have little to do with one another. Despite this, however, every city seems to know of every other city and there is no apparent strife or discord between any of the deepfallen communities. Analysts estimate the average city houses some forty million deepfallen.

The largest of these cities, which Regency cartographers have dubbed *Primus*, is near the point where the submarine *Glory* first encountered the deepfallen. It is believed that the population of Primus is roughly fifty million. The deepfallen Ambassador, Tethys, claims to be from this city, as does the whole of his staff. Despite this, Tethys asserts that his role is to speak for the entirety of the deepfallen people. As no evidence has emerged to dispute this assertion, the Bluefall Regency accepts it as true.

It is possible that there are other, smaller cities that have escaped detection. Considering the sophisticated sensors that continually sweep the planet, however, this seems unlikely.

A ring of so-called *farms* in which undersea plants and schools of fish grow surrounds each of these cities. Because of the depth at which the deepfallen live, sunlight is unknown in their cities and farms. In every case, the deepfallen locate their communities around active geothermal vents. These provide the raw materials and energy needed for their aquaculture. It is impossible to say whether or not these geothermal outlets are natural, artificial, or a combination of the two.

Science & Technology

Deepfallen technology is very different from that of Bluefall's human settlers. As an aquatic species, they have had little use for metallurgy or related sciences. Instead, however, they have mastered genetic engineering. They appear to make the most of the natural world, limiting their impact on the natural environment.

A good example of the deepfallen relationship with nature can be found in their dwellings and buildings. Many of the smaller structures are, according to the few human visitors who have seen them, apparently grown like the shell of a giant snail. Whether these giant mollusks evolved naturally or deepfallen genetic engineering shaped them is difficult to determine. The deepfallen have grown other large structures from large colonies of something akin to terrestrial coral.

Despite their aquatic nature, the deepfallen appear to understand many technologies that they do not themselves possess. The best evidence of this was in the original contact between the deepfallen and Captain Iannotti of the RBV *Glory*. While the deepfallen lack the ability to travel in space and show no interest in astronomical sciences, their representative at that historic meeting understood references to light-years, galactic positioning, and similar stellar properties.

The Origin of the Species

Careful handling of contact with the deepfallen has enabled the Regency to learn a great deal about this aquatic species and their history. It is doubtful that Regency diplomats could have managed to forge such solid ties with the deepfallen without the constant contact allowed by their covert mission at Depth Epsilon.

The deepfallen representative Tethys supplied much of the information presented here. If Tethys' tale is true, it paints a very disturbing and even dangerous picture.

In a time long before the recorded history of even the ancient t'sa, another species ruled the Verge. Examples of their civilization exist in scattered sites in the Verge, but researchers know almost nothing about them. Some suspect that the deepfallen are the degenerate descendants of these mysterious starfarers. When first presented with this theory, Tethys looked blank for several seconds and then made a facial expression, the deepfallen equivalent of an amused chuckle.

Tethys called this ancient race the *Patriarchs*. It is difficult to draw much information from any of the deepfallen about the Patriarchs. If one accepts Tethys' explanation, the Patriarchs had long forgotten the shapes bestowed upon them by evolution. Instead, they designed and constructed organic forms which would best suit the environment into which they were heading. Exactly how the consciousness of a Patriarch moved from one form to another is something the deepfallen do not appear to know. Or, perhaps, they are keeping this information to themselves for the time being.

Tethys believes that the Patriarchs were mortal. Yet the deepfallen think of the Patriarchs in the same way many humans think of God. Indeed, the deepfallen appear to believe that human religions are nothing more than a racial memory of their own creation at the hands of another Precursor race.

"Long before my people were shaped by their hands, the Patriarchs had grown weary of existence. They had traveled to the edge of space and found nothing worthy of their continued attention. When they had learned all that they wanted to learn, they turned their attention inward. They developed the powers of the mind far beyond anything achieved before. Then, when they understood all the many facets of their mental and spiritual selves, they knew their time in the universe had come to an end. As their numbers dwindled, the greatest of the Patriarchs sought a final escape from the racial despair consuming them."

At first, the men and women interviewing Tethys understood this to mean that the Patriarchs had committed some sort of wholesale suicide. As shocking as this might have been, however, the truth was even more disturbing. When he finally found the words to explain his understanding of the Patriarchs and their ultimate fate, he continued.

"The Patriarchs sought to escape our universe by moving into theoretical realms of existence previously unknown even to them.

"Even the power and wisdom of the Patriarchs was not sufficient to accomplish this goal, however. They needed the

assistance of another people, one that they would design and bring forth into the universe. In their dreams were we conceived. In their minds were we designed. By their hands were we fashioned"

Thus it was that the deepfallen, designed and created without input from the time-honored process of natural selection, came into being. At this point, the discussion ground to a halt again. Only with a good deal of effort Tethys could make himself clear. While the human delegates assumed that it was the role of the deepfallen to operate some sort of machines that would send the Patriarchs on their journey, this was not the case. The deepfallen, Tethys asserted, were the means by which the Patriarchs departed our universe. They were not gatekeepers; they were themselves the gates.

Exactly how this was done is a matter of considerable controversy. When Tethys was asked to provide more information or specifics, he stated that he could not. "My people did what we were created to do, no more and no less." In general, however, the following account seems to tell the story well enough.

It is no mystery that the deepfallen are a naturally gifted psionic species. Their whole society is apparently built around the rapport they have with one another and with the community as a whole. To some extent, the fraal share this ability and level of mental intimacy. Apparently, however, the deepfallen also possess a powerful psychic ability unknown elsewhere in the galaxy. At the command of the Patriarchs, the deepfallen focused their already considerable mental energies into a sort of group mind., excluding no one.

When they achieved this unified state of consciousness, the deepfallen unleashed a pulse of tremendous psychic power. This psionic pulse combined with the natural mental energy of the Patriarchs to send them on their unprecedented journey.

Did it work? Tethys does not know. To be sure, every one of the Patriarchs who had assembled within the Aegis system was gone. The deepfallen were alone. For several centuries, Patriarchs arrived on Bluefall to make the final pilgrimage. Over and over again, they asked the deepfallen to create the surge that would free them. And over and over again, the deepfallen swept the system clean of every sentient creature save themselves.

The news stunned those specialists assigned to learn from the deepfallen. Every member of the Regency diplomatic team had the same question, but none had the nerve to ask it. Finally, it was Jan DeClerk, the youngest member of the mission, who spoke. His psychic voice seemed to tremble with emotion as he said:

"Have you used this power recently?"

Making a surprisingly human gesture, Tethys lowered his eyes. He thought-spoke in a weak voice, aware that he might be saying far more than he should.

"Yes. We did not understand."

At this point, the already considerable curtain of security around the Depth Epsilon project was drawn even tighter. The Regency made the decision to keep this information from the public for the time being. The idea that the deepfallen had simply *wished* the human inhabitants of Aegis out of existence would not be well received by the general public or the representatives of the various stellar nations. Indeed, how would the normally open-minded Orion League react to learning the truth about the loss of their Aegis colony? And how would anyone respond to the knowledge that these aquatic aliens could do it again if another Patriach returned?

So far, the Regency has managed to keep this information contained. They have taken representatives of the Galactic Concord into their confidence, but not the emissaries of the other stellar nations. To prevent security breaches, the Regency has kept all trace of these revelations out of any computers in any way connected to the Grid. Fewer than twelve people outside of Depth Epsilon have access to this data; in the Depth Epsilon facility itself, only eight more know. In recognition of the fact that they must make this information public sooner or later, Regency officials have begun to lay plans for dealing with those parties who have a special interest in the Aegis system.

Interstellar Reactions

Careful consideration has been given to the public reaction expected if the truth about the Vanishing were to be released. The Regency and their Concord allies have come to the following conclusions.

The General Public: If it is at all possible, the average citizen of Bluefall learns of this information via a carefully worded official announcement. In the event of an accidental release of this information, the government quickly organizes a press conference to prevent any widespread concern.

The current plan calls for the information gathered about the deepfallen to be released in a fashion more or less consistent with the story related by Tethys to his human counterparts. In short, the government tells the public that the deepfallen were created ages ago by a people the deepfallen refer to as the Patriarchs. The spokesperson also discusses the deepfallen's role in the departure of these Precursors, although they downplay its importance. Lastly, of course, they address the subject of the Vanishing. They portray this as exactly what Tethys claimed it to be: a tragic mistake on the part of his people.

With any luck, the public accept the assurance of their government that all is well. If this proves not to be the case, the Regency may need to take more drastic measures. They have drawn up a number of contingencies, the most severe requiring a temporary suspension of civil rights and the concurrent establishment of martial law. The Regency's plan calls for such a state only until they have assured the safety of all of Bluefall's citizens, including the deepfallen. Almost no one believes that the matter is that drastic, no matter how it is presented to the public.

The Thuldan Empire: Roughly one in ten of Bluefall's 450 million inhabitants belong to the Thuldan Empire. This galactic power has focused considerable attention on the Aegis system and intends to be a major player there for some time. Indeed, the Thuldan fortress on Redcrown's outermost moon, Lhop, is second one of the most sophisticated in the Verge.

The Thuldan Empire is firm in its belief in human superiority. Almost certainly, a call would go forth from this nation for the extermination of the deepfallen. After all, so powerful a people, no matter how peaceful they might be now, would be a potential threat to humans.

It is unlikely that the Thuldan Empire would fully accept the deepfallen account of The Vanishing. They might very well believe (or assert) that the elimination of the human settlers was nothing less than an act of unchecked aggression. Should this be the case, a cry for vengeance similar to that sent forth in the wake of the Silver Bell tragedy would ring through human space. The fears engendered by recent clashes with alien forces at the fringe of human space could fuel this call to war. If, in the process of destroying these potential enemies, a way could be found to harness or duplicate their awesome power, so much the better.

The Orlamu Theocracy: Predicting the reaction of this religious state is not an easy task. Still, Regency experts believe that two scenarios are the most probably.

The first of these sees the deepfallen branded as liars or, worse yet, blasphemers. If this happens, the Theocracy is likely to call for the elimination of the deepfallen, just as the Thuldan Empire is expected to do. If history were any judge, this sort of holy war would be terribly bloody. While it is unlikely that the deepfallen have the military might to resist an attack by humanity, their true power is unknown. Even if they did not bring their greatest mental power to bear, what lesser weapons might be available to them?

The more probable course of action predicted by political strategists sees the deepfallen and the ascension of their parent race usurped into Orlamu doctrine. It is possible that they would see the journey made by the Patriarchs as a final step on the road to unity with the Divine Unconsciousness. Some estimates see a mass pilgrimage taking place, with Orlamu believers coming to the Aegis system and calling on the deepfallen to open the pathway to the patriarchs for them.

The greatest problem with such a mass elimination of Orlamu followers is the uncertainty of the process. Even if the Patriarchs made a leap in evolution or escape into another dimension, no one knows if the process works for human beings or other sentients. It may be that the power of the deepfallen works properly only when functioning in concert with the psychic resonance of their parent race. There are many that believe that the human colonists lost in The Vanishing were simply swept out of existence. Others speculate less pleasant fates, with the hapless dimensional travelers finding themselves caught in some sort of dimensional limbo.

It's also worth remembering that Tethys was unable to assert that the process had even worked for the Patriarchs. They had no way to confirm the success of the operation themselves. Once the Patriarchs were gone, they were gone. There was, apparently, no way for them to make contact with the deepfallen.

VoidCorp: The last major player in the Aegis system is VoidCorp. The great investment of this ancient corporation is best evidenced by their ongoing construction of a gas mine on Redcrown. When this facility enters service in a few years, VoidCorp's interest in the Aegis system will likely intensify.

VoidCorp executives want some assurance of the goodwill of the deepfallen. As the Regency itself is making something of a leap of faith in trusting the deepfallen, this is a difficult issue. With this in mind, the Regency has put plans in place to provide some measure of insurance for VoidCorp investments. In essence, the Regency has assured VoidCorp that it compensate any losses it suffers from a second vanishing or similar hostile action on the part of the deepfallen.

As it is likely that another vanishing would effectively eliminate the Bluefall Regency, of course, VoidCorp may well see such an offer as hollow. With that in mind, the Galactic Concord has agreed to guarantee the terms of the deal, compensating VoidCorp if the Regency is unable to do so.

The Orion League: Although the Regency of Bluefall has very strong ties to the Orion League, it is an independent state. Indeed, Orion recognition of this fact has been a major factor in the Regency's ability to thrive without undue influence from the other stellar nations. For that reason, Regent Hale is under a great deal of pressure to disclose to the Orion League everything the Regency has learned about the deepfallen. To date, however, the Orion League has been kept in the dark.

The reason for this is simple enough to understand. The original settlers of Bluefall were of Orion stock. It is very possible that a call for vengeance would go out if it were revealed that the deepfallen had been the instrument of their destruction. After all, not even the altruistic Orion League is immune to public pressure in such matters. Until President Hale can be certain that his counterparts in the Orion League can control the public reaction to these revelations, his orders remain unchanged.

In the event that the Orion League should learn the truth behind the loss of their only major holding in the Verge, the Regency hopes for a calm and rational understanding. To that end, they count on the influence of Concord diplomats as well. At present, Orion diplomats are being slowly fed portions of the information acquired from the interviews with Tethys and his aides. The Regency hopes that this gradual release of information reduces tensions and greatly limits any negative reaction to the final disclosure of the deepfallen history.

Should things not go the way Hale and the Regency expect, however, little can be done to placate the Orion League. Whether such tensions might escalate into something more severe than a diplomatic strain is impossible to predict.

Tethys

Deepfallen Senior Ambassador
Level 25 Deepfallen Diplomat (Mindwalker)

STR 7 (+1)	INT 14 (+3)
DEX 7	WIL 12 (+2)
CON 9	PER 13
Durability: 9/9/5/5	Action Check: 12+/11/5/2
Move: walk 6, swim 40	# Actions: 3
Reaction Score: Ordinary/2	Last Resorts: 3
Psionic Energy Points: 6	

Attacks

Mind Blast	12/6/3	d4+2s/d6+2s/d8+2s	En/0
Armor is ineffective against this attack			
Unarmed Combat	7/3/1	d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s	LI/0
+d4 unarmed combat modifier			

Defenses
Armor: none (LI), none (HI), none (En)

Skills
Unarmed Attack [7]; Manipulation [7]; Movement [9]–*swim [20]*; Stamina [9]–*endurance [12]*; Survival [9]–*deep water survival [11]*; Business [14]; Knowledge [14]–*deduce [20], first aid [16], human studies [18]*; Law [14]–*court procedures [15]*; Administration [12]–*bureaucracy [16], management [16]*; Awareness [12]–*intuition [16], perception [16]*; Resolve [12]–*mental resolve [16]*; Teach [12]–*Diplomat [13]*; Culture [13]–*diplomacy [19], human etiquette [18], first encounter [16]*; Deception [13]–*bluff [17]*; Interaction [13]–*bargain [22], charm [19], interview [20]*; Leadership [13]–*command [18], inspire [18]*; Telepathy [13]–*contact [16], mind shield [19]*.

Gear
Formal robes (incorporates antiscan weave), comm gear (Regency supplied), data slate (Regency supplied)

Tethys is the senior member of the deepfallen diplomatic team assigned to the Depth Epsilon enclave. Most of the Regency's information about deepfallen physiology, psychology, history and culture has been acquired through contact with him and his staff.

Although an open and friendly soul, Tethys plays things close to the vest. He understands that the fate of his people is in his hands. There are many in the Regency government who don't trust the motives of the deepfalen, especially in the wake of their revelations about the Vanishing. Tethys is keenly aware that his people would be all but helpless in the face of any major attack by humanity.

Tethys is committed to maintaining an open, working relationship with the Regency government. He is very fond of Oliver Crosby IV, his Regency counterpart at Depth Epsilon.

Tethys son, whose human given name is Pontus, is currently serving as a member of the Regency Sea Navy. He is the only member of the deepfallen currently enlisted in any branch of the Regency armed forces.

Oliver Crosby IV

Regency Ambassador to the Deepfallen
Level 15 Human/Orion Diplomat (Mindwalker)

STR 6	INT 13 (+2)
DEX 6	WIL 13 (+2)
CON 7	PER 15
Durability: 7/7/4/4	Action Check: 11+/10/5/2
Move: walk 2	# Actions: 2
Reaction Score: 0/2	Last Resorts: 4
Psionic Energy Points: 7	

Attacks

Unarmed Combat'	3/1/0	d4–1s/d4s/d4+1s	LI/0
Stutter Pistol'	9/4/2	d6+2s/d8+2s/d8+4s	LI/0
+d4 base situation die			
' carried only in emergency situations			

Defenses
CF Softsuit. d6 (LI), d6 (HI), d6–1 (En)

Skills
Athletics [6]; Modern Ranged Weapons [6]–*pistol [8]*; Vehicle Operation [6]; Stamina [7]; Business [13]; Computer Science [13], Knowledge [13]–*computer operation [16], deduce [16]*; Law [13]; Life Science [13]–*xenology [15]*; Administration [13]–*bureaucracy [14]*; Awareness [13]–*intuition [17], perception [17]*; Investigate [13]; Culture [15]–*diplomacy [20], deepfallen etiquette [16], first encounter [18]*; Deception [15]–*bluff [17]*; Interaction [15]–*bargain [18], charm [18], interview [18], intimidate [17]*; Leadership [15]–*command [19], inspire [19]*; Telepathy [15]–*contact [18], mind shield [17], suggest [17]*.

Gear
Formal suit (incorporates both CF softsuit protection and antiscan weave), comm gear, data slate

Oliver Crosby IV is a trusted member of the Regency diplomatic corps. His friendship with Bluefall's leader allows him to sidestep protocols when it seems prudent. At the same time, this insulates Crosby from the political maneuverings of his peers in the diplomatic corps.

Crosby was selected to head the Regency's covert operations at Depth Epsilon because of his natural psionic talents. It was believed that these would prove valuable in dealing with the psionic deepfallen.

Over the last several months, Crosby and his deepfallen counterpart Tethys have become close friends. While neither allows this to interfere with the work before them, the trust each has in the other allows many difficult issues to be dealt with through frank and forthright exchanges that might otherwise be impossible.

Crosby's influence with Regent Hale and friendship for Tethys was largely responsible for admission of the deepfallen mindwalker Pontus into the very exclusive ranks of the Aegis navy.

Chapter Five: Underwater Technology

The call of exploration and the unknown has driven the technical community to invent a wide array of personal and remote devices that facilitate the exploration of the undersea regions of Bluefall. Similar devices, of course, can be found on any number of similar worlds. For the purposes of this discussion, however, we'll focus on the standard issue gear employed by the Regency Sea Navy.

Underwater Gear

Bluefall has already established a reputation for producing high-quality underwater gear even while it was an Orion colony. The arrival of Christopher Hale and millions of other colonists has not changed that. The technology necessary for humans to work underwater is really no different in the twenty-sixth century from that used in the twentieth

SCUBA Outfit

Availability: Common
Cost: $750 (with one air tank)
$125 (per additional air tank)
Mass: 10 kg (with one air tank)
5 kg (with two air tanks)
Action Penalty: +2
Skill. Acrobatics–*daredevil*

The easiest way for men to explore the undersea world is through the use of scuba (short for self-contained underwater breathing apparatus) gear. Although centuries of technological evolution have made such items more advanced and reliable, the basic operating principles remain unchanged. The typical scuba outfit includes tanks of compressed air, a visor mask or helmet, a wet suit, and flippers.

The typical scuba outfit allows a diver to operate safely as a depth of up to 50 meters for periods of up to three hours. An additional air tank doubles the duration of the dive. The standard issue wet suit included with this package is not resistant to pressure, but does contain heating elements to protect against loss of bodily warmth.

Gillpack Outfit

Availability: Common
Cost: $1500
Mass: 8 kg
Action Penalty: +1
Skill· Acrobatics–*daredevil*

A gillpack is an advanced device, more expensive and sophisticated than standard scuba gear. Like its less advanced cousin, this outfit includes fins, a facemask, and a wet suit. What makes this equipment superior to the standard scuba outfit, however, is that it eliminates the need for heavy tanks of air. In its place, the diver wears a small mechanism that draws a breathable atmosphere out of the water itself.

With the aid of a gillpack outfit, the average human can dive to a depth of 50 meters without danger. The diver can stay underwater for any length of time short of 100 hours, when the powercell is drained.

Seamask

Availability: Common
Cost: $25
Mass: 0.5 kg
Action Penalty: 0
Skill: None

This slight piece of plastic is one of Bluefall's biggest exports to aquatic environments all throughout the Verge and the Stellar Ring Shaped like a domino mask without eyeholes cut out, this nonfogging gel-filled mask adheres to the face around the eyes and cheeks, though it leaves enough room for the person to blink his or her eyes. It keeps water out of the eyes and provides an unobstructed view while swimming. Only weren do not use seamasks, as their facial hair prevents it from sealing against their skin.

Seamasks are a trademark of Stolnis Sea Products, which makes the Verge's best-selling model, though it is also used haphazardly as a generic name by billions.

Pressure Weave

Availability: Common
Cost: $5250
Mass: 2 kg
Action Penalty: 0
Armor: d4 (LI)/d4–1 (HI)/d4–2 (En)
Skill. None

Those who wish to dive beyond the 50-meter safety limit associated with either a scuba or gillpack outfit should use a pressure weave body suit. This is an advanced wet suit and helmet combination designed to resist the increasing water pressure encountered at greater depths. With such equipment, the average human can dive to a depth of 250 meters

The resilient nature of a pressure weave suit provides the wearer with slight protection from attacks as well. Any damage that penetrates the suit indicates that a rip or tear. In such cases, the weave no longer protects the wearer from external pressures, which may result in injury or even death.

Basic Dive Armor

Availability: Common
Cost: $5,500
Mass: 35 kg
Action Penalty: +3 in water
+5 on land
Armor: d8 (LI)/d6 (HI)/d4 (En)
Skill: Armor Operation–*powered armor*

Dive armor, also commonly called a hard suit, allows the wearer to descend to depths well beyond the 250-meter limit of pressure weave. In many ways, dive armor is as much a vehicle as it is form of body armor.

A person wearing dive armor is protected down to a depth of 2500 meters. Internal environmental systems provide food, atmosphere, and heat for up to 240 hours. The integral propulsion unit built into every suit of dive armor allows the wearer to "swim" at a speed of up to 50 kilometers per hour. The powerful spotlights mounted on the suit illuminate objects at a distance of up to 25 meters

Advanced Dive Armor

Availability: Common
Cost: $7,500
Mass. 50 kg
Action Penalty: +3 in water
+5 on land
Armor: d12 (LI)/d8 (HI)/d6 (En)
Skill. Armor Operation–*powered armor*

Advanced dive armor has all of the features associated with the basic model, but also has an array of additional features. Foremost among these are active and passive sonar systems that allow the diver to image objects clearly at a distance of up to a kilometer.

Those protected by ADA can descend to depths of 5,000 meters, allowing them to reach the sea floor almost anywhere on Bluefall. Only the abyssal trenches where the deepfallen make their homes are beyond the reach of an explorer so equipped.

Survival Bubble

Availability: Common
Cost: $100
Mass: 1.5 kg

For those traveling over or under the seas of Bluefall, a survival bubble is a must have. These small items look very much like a 20th century flashlight and can be easily worn on a belt, tucked in a large pocket, or buckled to a PFD vest. In the event of an emergency, the user need only twist off one end of the device to activate it. Within seconds, it deploys a plastic sheath.

The user climbs in through a zippered seam, seals himself inside, and presses an activating button. Within a minute, the bubble inflates, keeping the user afloat and protected from the elements. When used properly, a survival bubble protects the user from even a stormy sea for up to a week. Throughout this time, an emergency transponder signals the authorities

PFD Vest

Availability: Common
Cost: $25
Mass 0.5 kg
Action Penalty: +1

A PFD (personal floatation device) vest is constructed of lightweight polymer foam. Although somewhat bulky, it can be incredibly valuable in the event of an accident at sea. The basic PFD vest keeps its wearer afloat even in rough seas for an indefinite period of time. More expensive versions of the PFD (costing $50) include an emergency transponder that activates to guide rescuers to a person in distress. On many worlds it is illegal for recreational sailors to set out without wearing some manner of PFD vest.

Manta

Availability: Common
Cost: $350
Mass: 5 kg

A manta (short for MANned Transportation Apparatus) is a small propulsion unit designed to speed a single user through the water at speeds of up to 50 kilometers per hour. The power cells on the manta allow it to function for up to 10 hours before recharging. Advanced versions of the manta (costing $500) are equipped with a sonar system allowing them to image the ocean a kilometer or so ahead of the diver. The typical manta function at depths of up to 250 meters.

Remote Sub

Availability: Common
Cost: $75,000
Mass: 150 kg

A remote sub is a small, unmanned vehicle designed for undersea work in places where men and women are unwilling or unable to travel. They can operate at depths of up to

6000 meters and store enough power internally to function for up to 24 hours. The standard remote sub is roughly a meter long and half that in width. It is equipped with a pair of robotic arms, allowing it to gather samples or manipulate objects around it.

The human operator, who mans a workstation up to 10 kilometers distant, controls the sub via a radio link. He bases his decisions on input received from the sub's onboard holographic cameras, sonar arrays, and other sensors.

Aqualasers

With little more than a shift in the color spectrum and focusing agents within the laser mechanism, Orion scientists made a tool that helped their original colonizing of Bluefall. They created a blue-green laser that operates just as effectively as a regular laser in the ocean depths. The effective range of the aqualaser is equal to regular laser pistols from air up to 100 meters beneath the sea. For every 100 meters beyond that, the laser's range dropped by 50% and step penalties occurred every 200 meters. Thus, while it is still a useful tool in any depths, its use as a ranged weapon against sea creatures is limited to the shallows.

In all, more than 85% of all aqualasers found anywhere in the Verge or the Ring are massive cannon-sized lasers mounted in drilling machines. However, with the rise of activity around Bluefall and the need for effective weaponry by numerous concerns have seen the rise in a market for these lasers. They can be purchased in rifles and pistols, though their costs are 25% above the norm for the waterproofing of the internal mechanisms and the adjustments to the generic weapon models.

Bluefall Vehicles

Given both the long isolation from the Stellar Ring and the resettlement since the Vanishing, Bluefall's people have learned to adapt to their world and produce industries and products that make life on the planet easier. Their transport vehicles are mostly watercraft (including grav enhanced vehicles).

More than a dozen different Regency and Orion aligned businesses support the aquatic vehicles industry that provides over 80% of the transport on Bluefall. Some of these have expanded their business beyond Aegis to such clients as the Concord Survey Service and independent explorers who wish to use the smaller craft on planetary surveys across liquid terrain.

Many of these are standard hovercraft designed with gravitic propulsion compensators for use atop Bluefall's oceans. The most common uses for these craft are for personal or public transportation as well as minor craft to supplement the military, local law enforcement, and the private sector. While the smaller skis and scooters operate on rechargeable lanthanide capacitors alone for power, all the others have solar energy backup to provide up to two days of power.

The following are example craft found on Bluefall. For the purpose of shortening this addendum to Table P42: Vehicles, all of these PL6 craft require knowledge of Vehicle Operation–*water vehicles* to successfully pilot them. They all also come equipped with standard comm gear with a range of at least 200 km. The generic statistics are noted as well as some particular brand models found on Bluefall.

Vehicle	Drv	Acc	Cruise	Max	Type	Dur	Avail	Cost
Aquascooter	–	8	24	32	O	2/2/2	Any	500
Gravbarge	–	12	24	32	G	8/8/4	Com	35K
Gravcruiser	+1	16	32	64	G	10/10/5	Com	50K
Gravski	–	24	36	80	O	3/3/2	Any	16K
Intercept	–1	26	40	80	G	4/4/2	Com	20K
Sea Lion	–1	26	40	80	G	5/5/2	Mil	24K
Gravtrawler	–1	16	24	36	G	8/8/4	Com	60K
Gravyacht	–	20	40	80	G	10/10/5	Com	80K
Comar Y-9	–	20	50	90	G	10/10/5	Com	120K
Comar YA-6	+1	16	36	80	A	12/12/6	Com	150K
Skiff	+1	24	70	90	G	8/8/4	Com	100K
Comar SX-1	–1	24	75	100	A	9/9/4	Mil	150K
Skisail	–	3	12	18	O	5/5/2	Any	10K
Rehjib	+1	4	16	24	O	5/5/2	Any	12K

Aquascooter: Very close in design to the jetski of PL5 tech, the aquascooter is actually a small hydrofoil craft for one person to ride like a motorcycle.

Gravbarge: A load-hauler and workhorse on Bluefall, these long, flat barges act as trucks and trains, moving goods and cargo among the islands.

Gravcruiser: The standard personnel carrier for the Regency Sea Navy as well as passenger boats from major ports, gravcruisers are simply hovercraft-ready cabin cruisers. These models are versatile enough to carry two gravskis at the stern without significantly altering its handling or speed.

Gravski: Like the cruiser above, gravskis are modified jetskis on hover pads. The Comar Intercept is a REC craft for one or two riders and has more acceleration and possible mounted weaponry. The Bedford-Galin Sea Lion has all the Intercept's features and takes more punishment, though it carries only one person due to a rear mounted automated weapons mount.

Gravtrawler: The typical coastal or deep sea fishing boat of Bluefall, gravtrawlers operate at stated speeds when fully loaded, cruising at 28 if only loaded with passengers and tourist gear rather than a full load of fish.

Gravyacht: The common pleasure boats of Bluefall provide sleeping berths for six and manageable speeds for personal craft. The Comar boats add some security and hidden features for contract buyers, such as business executives and the rich. The YA series, while still in production, is limited to governmental contracts, as their slower speeds are due to heavier defenses.

Skiff: The most common patrol boat skimming the waters of Bluefall is this powerful speed-hovercraft.

Limited to Regency Enforcement Command and various ministries within the RIA, the Comar SX-1 skiffs are the quick response craft of choice; older S-series models are available from the Regency and are in use as coastal patrol craft among the stellar nation island embassies. The skiffs can hold up to six people, though they're not equipped for comfort.

Skisail: The skisail looks exactly like ancient sailboats, though their lighter, stronger hull construction allows for an engine within that moves the ship when the wind doesn't cooperate. The Rahjib model provides aluminum-reinforced sails and a constantly running motor, which adds to the pickup and makes it more difficult to control, though it is the preferred model of personal craft among the younger crowd

Bedford-Oalin provides most of the military-grade vehicles as a primary Regency contractor. The close friendship Angus Oalin maintains with Christopher Hale makes these contracts nearly unbreakable, but neither of these honorable men understand the depths of collusion and embezzlement going on between B-O executives and some members of the military. Bedford and Oalin are the company's two home islands, the largest among a massive reef system and the only non-atolls within Navgrid J17.

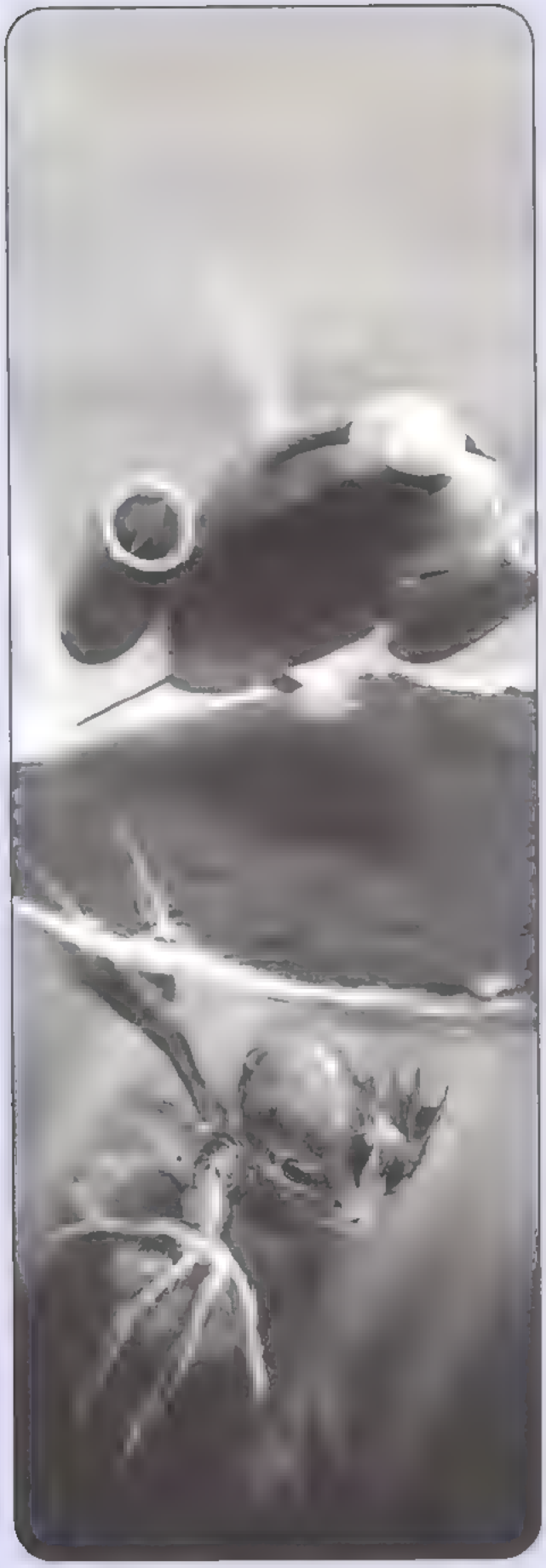
Comar Crafts is the oldest of the hovercraft manufacturers on Bluefall, and their Orion contacts provide them with the largest distribution net of all of these companies Comar actually remained in business after the Vanishing due to robots and automated assembly lines, and Albert Comar reclaimed the family business after returning from delivering a fleet of YA-4 cruisers to Alitar in the Algemron system. The old man's estate and his corporate headquarters dominate 25% of Haven 9 island that overlooks the four smaller islands that house the shipyards within Navgrid T8.

The Tarhandis Company makes the premier skysails and antique replica sailboats on Bluefall. Their biggest clients are Solars and many tourism companies eager to provide nostalgic and adaptable craft for their clients The largest and currently most profitable of the surface shipwright businesses, Tarhandis owns an entire chain of 8 small reef islands roughly 200 km north of Ohribil.

Thuldan Gillfolk

As revealed within the *Deep Cover* adventure, the Thuldan Empire has engineered a new mutant strain through which it may better inhabit (and perhaps, conquer) Bluefall: the gillmen. Currently numbering fewer than a score, the gillmen are on their way to becoming the latest Thuldan gene-breed of standardized mutants.

Their mutations allow them to operate better in underwater environments at greater depths than normally possible. They possess the following mutations: Redundant Organs (the addition of a gill-like structure that extracts breathable air



New Skill

Underwater Training

(Combat Spec, Tech Op); cost 2.
This skill can't be used untrained.

ally gain a –1 step bonus to these actions.

from water), Night Vision (allows the to see more clearly in the depths), and Adaptation: High Pressure Environments (allows them to dive to 250 meters without additional protection). The one drawback they exhibit is a Minor Physical Change (they have hairless sleek skin).

Standard skills and abilities for the gillfolk are Movement–*swimming 6*, Survival–*survival training* (undersea environments), Acrobatics–*underwater training* (as *zero g training* but for Bluefall's oceans), and Navigation–*underwater navigation*. The Thuldans are working to create gillmen with an electrical aura both for offensive reasons as well as an adaptation for work in the abyssal depths, where bioluminescence and electrical auras are norms for creatures there.

At the end of 2502, the 18 gillfolk live and work in the waters around Filtrane Island (14 of them) and the Vych Estate (5 or more, if they survive to gestate and the Nereid Outpost is not destroyed) and get acclimated to their new homes. Once they have some experience and training, the gillfolk's job for the Thuldans is intelligence work: Uncover more and more information about Bluefall's oceans, its flora and fauna, map out the sea beds and the resources found there, and finally reveal some of the mystery surrounding the deepfallen.

Nariac Cybermariners

Commodore Thomas Dodds of the Nariac Defense Forces at Outpost Taron on Berilar authorized the creation of cybernetic soldiers for underwater action and reconnaissance. At the present time, there are eight soldiers patrolling the sovereign waters around Berilar, and they answer only to Dodds. Aside from Mistress Raelun at Newlan City, only Dodds and the limited staff at Taron have any knowledge of the Cybermarine squad.

During the test phases of this project, five prototype cybermariners were created from volunteers. The first simply vanished from all sensors upon his first deep dive, and after that, tracking chips were among the first implants. The second exploded when his prototype leg jets malfunctioned, forcing compressed carbon dioxide and hydrogen back into his surrounding tissues. Two more went mad due to severe cases of the bends after deep dives. The final test cybermariner now leads the team—Captain Albert Habbart. All member of the team have adopted colorful nicknames: The captain goes by "Ahab," followed by Lt. Commander Sheldon "Hammerhead" McCoy, Lt. Ray "Manta" Commiss, and commissioned crew Roger "Queequeg" Quinn, Robert "Fins" Baskin, Eliott "Trident" Dergan, and Edward "Eel" Lasky

The cybernetic enhancements in all of them include at least the following: an internal diver's gauntlet in the left arm to provide 50m range sonar and an inertial map (Ordinary), internal aqualungs (see Underwater Tech) which filter oxygen directly from the water (Good); retractable feet fins, which add +2 to swim rates (Good); and cybernetic eyes suitable for low light and aquatic environments—necessitating sunglasses out of water (Ordinary).

VORL

Not even Dodds realizes that the former Les Dybrol, the first Cybermariner, still exists, though he is hardly alive. An artificial intelligence compromises most of his higher brain functions, and the invasive memory harness makes him little more than a biological remote for a mysterious external intelligence. A Thuldan security guard overheard the cybermariner gave his name out loud after it tried to kill Doctor Artemus Vych.

For more on VORL (the only Nariac Cybermariner encountered in this adventure), see the Supporting Cast of *Deep Cover* and the "Void of the Depths" sidebar.

Grid Control to Major

dated and horribly maintained Grid, Aegis and the

the AeGrid

Test Phases

Cover adventure, with only the communications and data sectors fully operational. Throughout all of 2501 and 2502, the Regency accepted proto-

to complement and improve the systems with the least invasive procedures. While neither of VoidCorp's two primary bids won the contract, their long-range plans put a viper in the AeGrid before it was even complete. Their efficient but uninspiring and easily ignored Grid proposal was so quickly abandoned, no one checked to clear all

which it had linked. While others quickly linked

AI VORL kept tightening links between the AeGrid and its own supercomputer network hidden on

alludes to this infiltration

The AeGrid Today

Cover adventure.

appear as planets around the double star of Aegis, and

Bluefall or as mining stations on Redcrown, which the

AeGrid defense programs and Grid cops also adapt

Concord sees as a step to unity

Chapter Six: The People of Aegis

The Regency of Bluefall is without a doubt the most diverse culture in the Verge. Although originally a colony modeled after the ways of its Orion founders, both before and after the Vanishing, Bluefall is now a unique entity. The people and government of Bluefall have their own customs, goals, and ideals. While these often match the values shared by the Galactic Concord and the Orion League, the realities of life in the Verge have mandated certain changes.

To date, STAR*DRIVE sourcebooks have provided a great deal of information about the Aegis system. Here, we add a bit more to some of the nuts and bolts of the people and the institutions they've created.

Social Outlook

By and large, the people of Bluefall are progressive and compassionate. They recognize that change and evolution are natural elements of their lives. No matter how well something works, whether it is a political process or an economic system, there are always ways to improve it. This belief has led the citizens of the Regency to regularly embrace new social programs and political initiatives that might be shunned on other, less progressive, worlds.

As a people, the citizens of the Regency of Bluefall aggressively pursue new ideas and self-improvement. This isn't to say that there aren't lazy slobs lurking in the island cities of the Regency; rather, such citizens are the exception. Most employers reward individuals who find ways to improve the place they work, and the government provides numerous tax incentives to promote the development of new enterprises and technologies.

Poverty is not common on Bluefall. Progressive system governments in Old Space do not have the sort of economic success that Bluefall enjoys. Shortly after its inception, the Regency government established social programs to look after its citizens. Job training, disability, and other programs assist people through difficult times.

Political Philosophy

With such an open-minded populace, many outsiders are surprised to discover that the Regency of Bluefall is actually a dictatorship. For those who have never lived on Bluefall, this term conjures up images of repressive police states. But this simply isn't the case.

Christopher Hale may be a dictator, but he's a popular one. He has mandated any array of popular social programs and a legal system designed to protect the rights of citizens. Hale has also forged an economy that rewards free enterprise without allowing corporate interests to dominate society.

Perhaps Hale's success comes in part from his upbringing. While he may have eventually become a very pronounced thorn in his father's side, Hale was trained from childhood to assume a position of political power with the Orion League. Because of this, he developed a progressive view of the role of government and its responsibility to the people under it.

As he grew older, Hale saw the good that government could do. At the same time, however, he saw its darker side as well. He was horrified by events of GW2, a war seemingly without end. As the death tolls mounted, Hale became more and more convinced that he must take a personal stand against such abuses of power. It was this determination that led him eventually to the military academy on Ericis and, ultimately, to the distant world of Bluefall.

In the end, the influences that shaped Christopher Hale have shaped life in the Aegis system. To survive in the unstable conditions of the Verge, his followers needed a strong leadership. Without that leadership, the Regency would long ago have degenerated into a balkanized collection of rival states or, worse yet, been utterly dominated by the very powers they sought to left behind.

For the most part, the citizens of Bluefall accept this as truth. This may be because they've been told it over and over for many years. On the other hand, it may be true.

When the citizens of Bluefall look around the rest of the Verge, they see chaos. Even in the distant realms of Old Space, they fail to find order. The constant struggles for power and dominance of one nation over another, of one class over another, seem to be everywhere. On Bluefall, thanks to the able and determined hand of Christopher Hale, people have forged an organized, benevolent state.

Customs

The people of Bluefall are a remarkable lot. They prize their liberties and value their independence from the often-oppressive hands of the stellar nations. At the same time, however, they willingly embrace a man who is, truth be told, a dictator. While these contrasts may be difficult for outsiders to take in, a look at some of the social practices and customs of the citizens of the Regency may serve to better illuminate the matter.

Charity

The people of Bluefall look upon charitable contributions as a duty to society. This is reflected in a series of laws mandating all citizens to donate 5% of their income to a recognized charity. Failure to meet one's obligations in this matter is considered fraud and is punishable by a substantial fine (generally equal to half-again the money withheld) and community service.

In most cases, an employer handles this matter for the individual. When someone accepts a position with a firm, he provides them with the name of the charity he wishes to support. On payday, the appropriate money is deducted from his wages before he ever sees it.

Weaponry

[illegible] lized planet of Bluefall are forced to give up this [illegible] stricter laws governing the ownership or use of [illegible] Regency to own any type of firearm. Other laws provide for strict regulation of knives, swords and other weapons, although a proper license allows a person to purchase such items.

[illegible] Punishment for the violation of these laws is severe. In fact, the use of a handgun in the com[illegible] an individual his citizenship and place him in exile.

Community Service

Just as the people of Bluefall have factored charitable donations into their society, so too do they incorporate public service.

The average workweek on Bluefall is 35 hours. All citizens put in another 5 hours of community service work. Employers are required by law to accommodate this and face stiff fines if they hinder an individual's service time.

Typical examples of the community service work done by Regency citizens includes volunteering in schools, working in hospitals, or taking part in relief efforts for those who have suffered a loss or disaster.

Holidays

The people of Bluefall, like those everywhere, love their holidays. In addition to celebrating many of the traditional human holidays, however, there are three important celebrations unique to Bluefall.

Founders Day: Roughly the equivalent of numerous Independence Day celebrations held throughout human space, Founders Day commemorates the arrival of the original Orion colonists on Bluefall. Parades, fireworks, public concerts, and family outings are the mainstay of the typical Founders Day celebration. The Bluefall Baseball League holds its traditional Hero's Game on Founders Day, showcasing the most popular players in an exhibition game.

Remembrance: Originally instituted as a solemn day of prayer and morning for those lost in The Vanishing, Remembrance has become a celebration of the mystical and supernatural more or less like Halloween on Earth. Although church services and similar functions are typically held at sunrise on Remembrance Day, sunset marks the onset of a very different celebration.

Regent's Day: The first day of every year is known as Regent's Day. Although technically a day for celebrating the continued health of the Regent, most people look forward to Regent's Day because it means a day off from work and a chance to relax.

Gambling

There are those who say that the people of Bluefall fought off the Thuldan attack in 2498 because they knew the Empire would shut down the casinos. While this is certainly an exaggeration, it isn't a great one. The citizens of Bluefall love to gamble.

There are three types of gambling establishments on Bluefall.

Public Casinos: These are the most obvious gambling houses on Bluefall. They survive and prosper by courting the tourist trade. Public casinos are garish affairs with bright lights and scantily clad employees that offer huge jackpots at long odds. Most of the locals avoid these places because they are more heavily weighted in favor of the house than the smaller, private casinos.

Private Casinos: Much less obvious in appearance and much more sedate in atmosphere, these facilities are supported by the citizens of Bluefall. As a rule, the odds of winning here are slightly better, but the jackpots are somewhat lower. To enter a private casino, one must be a member. Memberships are usually inexpensive, in the neighborhood of $25 per year. Some private casinos are part of larger chains and membership at one allows entry into all the casinos in the chain.

Basement Casinos: Even though gambling is legal on Bluefall, there are still black market casinos. Both public and private casinos turn a percentage of the take over to the government in the form of entertainment taxes. The so-called basement casinos avoid this responsibility. In addition, the basement casinos often take wagers on things not featured at legitimate establishments.

The best example of this is the sport of boxing. Illegal on Bluefall and publicly held to be a barbaric spectacle, boxing is a mainstay of basement casinos. No organization regulates the sport, so matches are often fixed.

Government

As critics of the Regency are quick to point out, Christopher Hale is a dictator. He may be a benevolent one, interested in peace and the well being of his subjects, but he is still the absolute master of all he surveys. Dictator or not, however, Christopher Hale couldn't rule the planet without the support of a large government bureaucracy.

Much of the governmental structure in place on Bluefall has a military feel to it, growing as it did from the rigid hierarchy of shipboard life mandated during the so called *Flight From Erics*. Its actual structure, however, is more akin to that of republics and representative democracies.

"The Jubilee Consortium"

ishing in 2452. With the arrival of the Regency Malcolm Doncaster bought many of the abandoned

With the additions and expansion of these lesser 25% of the total tourism businesses within Aegis and concerns within Jubilee include more than a dozen dif-

world politics of Bluefall, neither do the following characness to a Gamemaster in need of common-place a campaign in Aegis and Bluefall. Gamemasters can following characters work for the Jubilee Corporation,

rogue owns and charters a small fleet of four fishing

sloops on Nathan. Word about the Concord-owned you want to get away from it all and not be found on remote islands for a vacation.

Robert Taylor (Hm/Concord/CS13): This one-eyed cybernetically replace his left eye, as it adds to his charm and shows the rubes how dangerous these can afford his high prices diving along the Khoirn predators and trophy fish. For ¤3,000 and a release from liability, Bobby also takes folks hunting for all are accomplished boatsmen and divers.

Luc Barrag (Hm/Concord/BTO-14): As chief man wife Elle settled on Haven 3 but moved to Diandes to connections have ever been proven.

Nora Avalov (Hf/Terrvine/TO-18): One of Jubilee's who monitors Jubilee's private Grid network that mation or even well hidden backdoors into the

the Whale's Tooth nightclubs.

Legislature

While the principal vision for the government resides solely with Christopher Hale, he has delegated many of these responsibilities to a number of cabinets. Each of these is charged with the responsibility for creating the laws that govern some aspect of society. The typical legislative cabinet and is composed of between five and fifteen *Secretaries*. The best known of these is the Regency Defense Forces Command. Other cabinets include the Council of Sciences, the Education and Socia. Engineering Committee, the Council of Trade/Economics, and the Foreign Relations Cabinet.

While these institutions have almost total authority to regulate the areas entrusted to them, they are all subject to the absolute veto power of Regent Hale. To date, the Regent has never exercised that power, preferring to see things resolved before it gets to that. Disputes between the various cabinets are resolved by a five-member Board of Policy Review, which functions very much like a civil court and decides the matters brought before it by a simple majority vote.

Regent Hale appoints cabinet members himself. As such, they always tend to reflect his vision of how a given aspect of society should function. The standard term of service for these appointments is three years, although renewal of an appointment is more or less automatic unless the Regent has been unhappy with the performance of the cabinet member.

Enforcement

The Regency Enforcers enforce the laws put into place by the various cabinets. The Enforcement Command is a division of the Army. While some people see this as a draconian measure to keep the populace in line, Regent Hale insists that things are this way for the purposes of simple efficiency. Outside observers have conceded that, with so little surface area for a standing army to defend, Hale's explanation has a certain logic. Others fear what would happen if such measures were in place with a less "enlightened" leader at the helm.

There are very strict laws governing the conduct of Enforcers during their investigations. These prohibit undue use of violence, imprisonment without cause, and so on. Despite the fact that Bluefall is an autocracy, the police generally conduct themselves with honor and determination. Of course, this doesn't mean that no corruption exists among the Enforcers. A rigid policy of internal regulation keeps these things to a minimum, however.

The people of Bluefall have no guaranteed Bill of Rights, at least, not one in writing. The liberties they enjoy are those deemed appropriate by Regent Hale. Currently, civil liberties are among the most extensive of any society in human space, and Hale has erred on the side of maintaining them over granting any additional authority to the Enforcement Command. In the hands of a another ruler, life on Bluefall could easily become a totalitarian nightmare.

Judiciary

The jury trial is unknown on Bluefall. When an individual is arrested, a panel of three judges determines his fate. One of several types of courts, depending on the law violated, decide the matter. In all cases, a simple majority vote convicts or exonerates the defendant.

The judges can dismiss a case without a finding if two of the three of them believe they have insufficient evidence to convict but still probable cause to suspect guilt. In such cases, the law permits a second trial if investigating authorities find new evidence. It is worth noting that either the prosecution or the defense may call for a second trial. Many citizens who believe that a case dismissed without finding is still a black mark on their record use this procedure to clear themselves of any suspicion.

Military Courts

Those who are arrested for any crime of violence, including a crime accompanied by the actual or implied threat of violence, have their fate decided by a military court. As the name suggests, the judges presiding over these forums are Regency Army officers.

As a rule, military tribunals hand down very severe punishments upon conviction. For lesser crimes, where an implied or actual threat of violence exists but in which no harm was actually inflicted, the sentence usually consists of incarceration. More severe crimes, in which violence is involved but no lasting harm is done, generally bring a revocation of citizenship and exile. (While the latter penalty may seem unusual, it is worth noting that there are few prisons on Bluefall. With land area as scarce as it is, little territory can be spared for prisons. As such, exile is not an uncommon sentence.) Any crime that involves violence with a lasting effect, including murder, carries the death penalty on Bluefall. This is a planet with little tolerance for violence.

Civilian Courts

In cases where a crime involves the misappropriation of funds, fraud, or the like, a civilian trial tries the case. The three judges who oversee these matters are appointed by the legislature and serve for life or until impeached and removed from office.

The penalties handed down for conviction in civilian courts generally involve fines, reparation for damages, and periods of public service. In especially severe cases, the tribunal may vote to pass the matter along to a military Court.

Societal Courts

The third type of courts found on Bluefall adjudicates matters involving civil rights and so-called victimless crimes. This includes everything from civil disobedience to invasion of privacy or standards for public behavior. The matters that come before the societal courts are far more diverse and call for more subjective decisions on the part of the magistrate.

The punishments handed down by the societal courts are as diverse as the cases themselves. As a rule, anyone convicted in societal court is punished in a manner that makes amends for his crime. In rare circumstances, a case may be handed over to a civilian or military court for consideration.

The Regency Military

The Regency military is made up of three services: the Stellar Navy, the Sea Navy, and the Army. Yet despite this seemingly simple basic organization, these services are

bureaucracies unto themselves. A Secretary oversees each service, as detailed in the STAR*DRIVE campaign book. Working for each of these are many subordinates who actually maintain military readiness, from the soldiers and officers of the military commands to the support personnel who see to it those troops are fed, paid, and supplied.

There is, in fact, a fourth service that has responsibilities in both the military and civilian arenas: the Regency Intelligence Service (RIS). Because the RIS's duties are to keep the Regency safe by providing accurate, timely information to government leaders, this section will address them as well.

The Regency Stellar Navy

The Stellar Navy has some 400 ships under its command, quite a fleet for a single-system government. Although many of these are not large ships, the Stellar Navy does have a dreadnought, six battlecruisers, twenty-three cruisers, and over fifty escort frigates. The Stellar Navy has divided these ships into seven fleets, each with a different mission.

The First Fleet is one of the battlegroups assigned to system patrol duty; its assigned station is near Research Station Echo, the outpost on Flotsam. Second Fleet, also on system patrol duty, watches the area around Redcrown, especially the Thuldan and VoidCorp installations there. As the Thuldans have established a small but effective naval force there, tensions in Second Fleet always run high. Third Fleet is the one most often encountered outside of Aegis system space, as its assigned duties include assisting in the security of the two small Regency colonies. In addition, Third Fleet often supplements Concord squadrons in the Verge, although to date, they have refused to become involved in internal disputes of other Verge powers.

Fourth Fleet is actually a training fleet, assigned to the academy at Starcrest. Fifth and Seventh Fleets have been assigned to patrol the space around Bluefall itself. The Regency's largest ship, the dreadnought *Sanctuary*, is the new flagship of Seventh fleet. Few ever encounter Sixth Fleet, as its assigned mission is cloaked in secrecy. It is this fleet that most directly works with the Concord in determining the threat posed by the External species hostile to the people of the Verge. The fleet has been equipped with sophisticated sensor and communications equipment which enable it to conduct deep space exploration missions.

In addition to these standing fleets, the Regency has a few task forces. These are short-term arrangements designed to complete a particular mission.

The Regency Sea Navy

No less important, and a good deal more visible, a service is the Regency Sea Navy. The Sea Navy's responsibilities include

Regency Starship Subsidies

military hulls, which puts them out of the price range of

acquire a small four-compartment ship would pay only
*100K for a civilian courier hull; for a cutter (a military
is paid off

standard could prove prohibitive.

ice.

Regency government

exploration vessel under the command of Cullen

patrolling the waters of Bluefall and providing the aerospace defensive network.

The Sea Navy has two basic elements: the surface fleets and the submarine squadrons. The Regency has organized the surface ships into nine fleets: three battle fleets (comprised of ships capable of taking on other warships directly) and six strike fleets (those arranged around carriers). The strike fleets are also the primary components of the aerospace defense network, but even the battle fleets add sophisticated missile systems capable of knocking out an enemy's assault landers. These fleets are assigned the duties of protecting not only Regency soil (including floating cities), but also of keeping freedom of navigation of the open seas. They also aid in search-and-rescue missions in Bluefall's often tempestuous weather.

The submarine squadrons are less well-known. Some of the most sophisticated submarine technology in known space has gone into constructing this force. As a result, they are difficult to track. Most other powers on Bluefall do not realize just how deep Regency subs can travel (about 10–11 km, compared with 7–8 km by the best submarines of the Thuldan fleet). The submarine squadrons have the traditional mission

of patrolling the depths to protect the Regency from underwater attack. In addition, however, with the discovery of the deepfallen, they have added the mission of protecting the deepfallen from some of the unscrupulous stellar nations. This includes maintaining constant vigilance around Depth Epsilon, the secret underwater research and diplomatic facility where Regency personnel make contact with the deepfallen.

The Regency Army

The smallest of the services, and considered by some the weakest, the Regency Army has made great strides in recent years. Secretary Nadine Cox (hf/Orion/DCS-6) has embarked on an ambitious program of training and modernization designed to integrate the Army more closely with the other services. The recent acquisition of powered armor has enabled Cox to create not only a Powered Infantry Regiment, but also to train additional troops as shipboard marines for the Stellar Navy. These powered troops work closely with armor regiments in combined arms operations. Cox hopes these exercises will allow her to add more Powered Infantry Regiments to the Army's available assets, as their success integrating with armor tactics has been notable.

The bulk of the Regency Army is the light infantry regiments. Although not so well equipped to conduct modern ground assaults, these are excellent defensive and rapid-response units. Their modernization has been slow, thanks primarily to a heated debate about whether to acquire a newer slugthrower or to switch to energy weapons as the infantry soldier's primary weapon.

Two of the light infantry regiments have been converting to undersea troops. Although unable to operate deep under the surface, they provide a valuable benefit to Regency underwater warfare capabilities. Unconfirmed reports hold that these troops have already been involved in several reconnaissance missions on the islands of other Bluefall powers.

The Regency Enforcement Command, the police force of the Regency, is part of the Army. They are charged with maintaining the peace throughout Regency territories, arresting those suspected of criminal activities and turning them over to the justice system. Although the REC is one of the principal focuses of pro-republic elements, they have relatively little cause for complaint, as not only does the REC police itself, but a division of the Regency Intelligence Service does as well.

The Regency Intelligence Service

As expected, the actual daily activities of the RIS are a closely guarded secret. It serves one function: to keep the government apprised of any threats to Regency security. Although it is a civilian organization, it has such extensive ties to the military services that it functions as much like a military organization as a civilian one.

It divides with the military intelligence community the role of gathering, analyzing, and reporting information. The RIS concentrates on strategic information (the intentions of the Thuldans, the prevention of information about the deepfallen falling into the wrong hands, analysis of the External threat, and so on). The military intelligence community is most concerned with tactical data (the upgrade of Thuldan warships with a new weapon system, the predicted avenues of approach in the event of an attack on Bluefall, the fighting capabilities of the klicks, and so on). Although in theory this makes the collation of intelligence data smooth, there are sufficient crossover areas that bureaucratic disputes occur from time to time. The usual resolution to such problems is that both the RIS and the military people work on a given issue; the RIS often forms an ad hoc team to study the issue in question.

Most of RIS's personnel are analysts. The sheer volume of information requires a sizable pool of people who do nothing but pore over data, looking for a pattern. Field agents comprise less than 10% of the RIS's actual human resource pool.

Power Players of Aegis

After the broad discussion of government and economy, it is time to take a closer look at who calls the shots and who controls the most power of any sort. As always, the stellar nations of Old Space have power that the Regency cannot ignore, regardless of their relative small hold within the Aegis system.

What are everyone's broad goals, plans, and wishes for Aegis? Why is this place so important for all of them? Let's take a quick look at the major players in this game whose winners may control the Gem of the Verge.

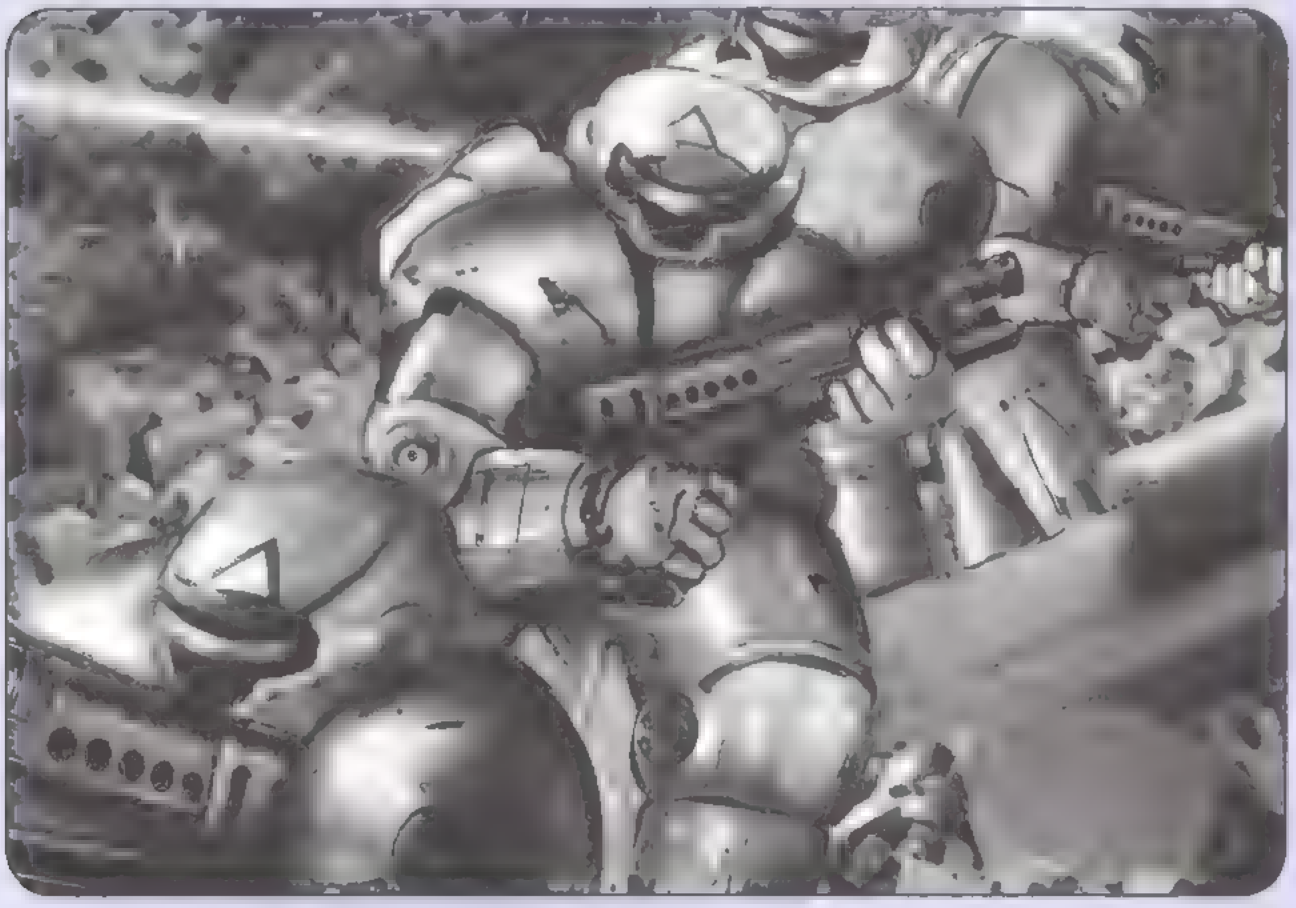
Verge Political Concerns

Vergers everywhere look at Bluefall and Aegis and recognize its importance to them as a center of commerce, a politically neutral setting for diplomacy and negotiation, and as home to the strongest Verger government, the Regency, which helped so many through the Long Silence. Now, with the stellar nations back in force and numerous powers great and small vying for control of the Verge, they look to Aegis and the Regency again to help the Verge put a united view before the collected delegates of Old Space

The Regency of Bluefall

Obviously the Regency controls Aegis as its ruling autocratic government, though most of its operations stem from a more republican bureaucracy. In a nutshell, Christopher Hale and his ministers force compromises and balances in power by keeping any one group (other than the Regency, that is) from holding too much influence in any one area. The most immediate concerns for Christopher Hale and his ministers are the following:

The Deepfallen: Hale and precious few others know of Depth Epsilon and the work with the deepfallen; they also sit



on one of the biggest secrets of this government (see the section on the deepfallen). Much effort within RIA keeps the other powers from uncovering the truth.

The Stellar Nations: While very much a Verge state and power, the Regency often suffers accusations from more zealous Vergers that it ignores them and their problems over those of the stellar nations. On the surface, Christopher Hale's tactics seem to support this, as he and his ministers confer often with the stellar nation delegates on Bluefall. However, from Hale's perspective, if keeping them quiescent eases outside tensions in the Verge, so much the better.

Many natives also question the wisdom of providing some of the largest landmasses on Bluefall to the stellar nations, as many hundreds of thousands of immigrants arrive each year, looking to settle on the island planet. Christopher Hale planned this tactic with the Concord Administrators who came to the Verge in the Monitor after the Long Silence. Effectively, by giving up select territories and local control to *all* of the stellar nations, it keeps any of them from claiming the system as theirs due to everyone's stake here. Staying here at the discretion of the Regency keeps the nations and their international disputes in relative check, since disturbing the peace of any Regency or Concord territories invites suspension of charters and treaties or the loss of their sovereign territories. Above all else, the Regency knows the ambassadors will not risk losing what for some is their sole hold in the Verge, and counts on that to keep things at relative détente and provide a venue for trade and political dialogue for all.

The Verge Merchants League: The Regency's backing of this fledgling concern fits its tactics of diversifying any influence among numerous powers. While Verge trade policies remain far more open than nationally controlled trade lanes in Old Space, forced reliance on Redman-Smith and few other trade guilds gave them much authority among mercantile powers. The Regency helped create this guild dedicated to open trade among Verge systems to increase opportunities for smaller businesses and decentralize economic power.

Other Verge Powers

Of course, while Aegis sits at the heart of the Verge and its Regency influences matters across the Verge, other powers of the Verge have some influence on them.

Redman-Smith: The trading corporation that regulates much of the trade out on the Verge feels betrayed by the Regency's creation of the Merchants' League. While outright boycotts or moratoria against shipments to and from Bluefall and Aegis haven't happened, Redman-Smith dropped the price of some common commodities, bankrupting some independent traders who joined the League as their cargo's prices plummeted while they were between starfalls.

Barons of Lucullus: While many smugglers and black marketers are independent, most of those found within the Aegis system owe fealty (or at least serious amounts of money) to the Jamaican Syndicate. However, with some under the table dealings with Austrin-Ontis and Nariac delegates, the Technospiders have some minor agents present on Bluefall looking into weapons smuggling off planet and into the rest of the Verge.

Smugglers

terry contraband goods to places where the Concord

Oberch (M/ Independent/ FA-16): This heavily tattooed machaius woman is one of the most powerful smugglers in seven systems as head of a cadre of more than four score loyal operatives across the Aegis, Tendril, Corrivale, and Terivina systems. Her island base, nicknamed Treasure Island by some of

grid mark P6. It is no larger than two kilometers in

Loohir Herald-class ships (which pose as a courier service among the Verge planets while smuggling

emerald dragon dominates her arms, back, and shoulders, though she is cold logic in contrast to its

making a buck specifically at the expense of the stellar nations, especially VoidCorp.

Simal Torream (Sm/ Corrivale/ DCS-8): This male

Simal has managed to set up some small concerns

among the equatorial islands for some land to

on- or off-planet without official notice—though

Entertainment Concerns: The most profitable trades in the Verge are the entertainment companies. Mask & Bauble provides more than 25% of the holofilms made in the Verge, and its production services are the most advanced outside of those in the Stellar Ring. Its location on Bluefall also gives it some pull in directly cutting distribution and production deals with the nations directly. Celestial Enter-

tainment Limited concerns M&B only by its desire to steal Jack Everstar—"the man who made Bluefall famous". For the most part, though, entertainment media of the Verge sees Aegis as the place where their holofilms and productions can be processed without interference by the stellar nations.

Concord Free Now: Strangely enough, the radical CFN has never committed any open acts of terrorism against the stellar nations on Bluefall since their return. Some Arrivers mutter about collusion between CFN and the Regency, though most dismiss that rumor as counter to Regent Hale's beliefs. Most of the CFN strikes occur among the moons of Redcrown against the Orion, Oriamu, and VoidCorp mining facilities.

The Stellar Nations

Each and every stellar nation has representatives within the Aegis system, all prominently located in embassies on both Hughes Island and on their own sovereign islands granted them by the Regency. Many of the same plots and intrigues that plague the Stellar Ring reach all the way to the petty bureaucrats and "little Napoleons" placed here. Many of the diplomats and ambassadors overstep their actual granted powers, as they are far from their superiors more than 1,000 light years away, and they revel in their relative autonomy. Still, while there are many chances for subversion, the Concord's heavy investments in the Verge and the Regency's iron-clad control of Bluefall keep the abuses to a minimum. All that said, there are still a number of stellar nations whose interests and activities have great impact on the Aegis system.

For a closer and more active look at some of the entanglements among some of the stellar nations, look to the *Deep Cover* adventure and its sidebars for some activities of the Nariac Domain and the Thuldan Empire (and VoidCorp, at least as a campaign continuance)

Galactic Concord

The Concord is the stellar nation most invested in the Verge, at least in terms of keeping the Verge from becoming another international battleground. Thanks largely to the Concord Administrators, the Committee on Verge Integration, the Galactic Court, and the presence of the *Lighthouse*, the Verge's people have the choice to rejoin their parent nations or remain autonomous and independent frontier colonies. The Concord sees Bluefall and Aegis as the key to maintaining peace in the Verge, as its position as both sovereign and independent territory for each of the nations makes it a unique staging area for diplomatic summits. The Concord maintains territory on Bluefall on Diandes Island. They also have other stations in the system.

Gamemaster's Note: Offices on Nectaris and Meias Stations (in Bluefall's orbit) and the survey stations on Kraic (a Redcrown moon) provide a wide view of the system, which the Concord uses freely with the Regency to promote solid relations between them. More and more alliances and quiet links have developed between the Concord and the Regency, and other powers have grown restless over the closeness of the Concord to this one government and its ramifications for the entire Verge. CFN has begun spreading rumors that Aegis may be the first step in the founding of Concord Regency as a stellar nation, which both sides actively deny (though consider it a potential move, given the rising threat of the Externals such as the klicks and the kroath).

Orion League

Strangely enough, the Orion League hardly objects in the least to the changes in the Aegis system, despite their original claims to it. Instead, the Orions work in parallel with the Regency, much like the Concord does, and the tripartite alliance helps keep the peace, as all three have equal investment in preventing the conflicts of GW2 from flaring up again. The familial bonds among Orion League families and the Regency settlers make for easy ties, though those ties sometimes tighten too much for the more independent Vergers. Tensions among Orion settlers and those who now consider themselves Regency citizens rise at times, though Orion leaders rarely push the issue of reunification after CFN strikes against other Verge holdings.

Gamemaster's Note: What many overlook is the intelligence the Orions have about Bluefall and Aegis in general. Given their initial colonization, Orion League scientists still have the lion's share of data about this system and its resources as well as investments not shared with others. The League's secret holdings in Aegis include well-hidden mining and scientific outposts on the Redcrown moons of Raeb and Relso. In addition, they control a heavily shielded and isolated tunnel project linking Hughes, Regency, and the Steadfast Islands (of which RIA knows nothing, though Regent Hale is aware of it). They also oversee the base on Jetsam, believed abandoned but currently inhabited by a small team of Orion technicians and field agents. Finally, they have several "back door" security bypasses that are still in place among some more remote outposts built by Orion League colonists but acceded to Regency control, though the intelligence on these is limited to a few highly placed operatives and leaders.

Oriamu Theocracy

The bulk of the Oriamist settlers and stationed personnel on Jort Island came to Aegis and Bluefall to investigate the Vanishing and to build a base from which wider Verge operations could be launched. While there are a number of installations on the island beyond the main settlements within Mount Jort, they constitute a minimal intrusion on the wildlife since they expand their buildings down into the island (and place windows in their foundations to peer into the underwater world around them). All other settlements on the island are the semi-primitive encampments of weren settlers, whom also provide supplemental perimeter defenses by hunting anyone who lands unannounced on Jort. Their other holdings on Redcrown's Nirb moon are strictly to investigate the phenomenon of the Vanishing.

Gamemaster's Note: Jort is the home of more than 50% of the weren found in the Aegis system and almost 10% of the weren found in the Verge overall. While their research on the Vanishing continues, much of the Orlamist influence and activity within Aegis comes from their ownership and control of the Redstar Media network (a popular Verge-wide news organization & network) and Lotran-Katavi holofilms (a major business on the Tyardine islands with Verge-wide distribution).

StarMech Collective

Starships represent StarMech's major involvement in Aegis, as it fills orders from the Stellar Navy through its shipyards at Alaundril. However, the Collective does have an ambitious ambassador on Bluefall whose sole intention is to carefully watch and hinder any power plays economically disadvantageous to StarMech. Given the penchant for hedonism among StarMechs as well, the embassy and surrounding official settlements occupy only 20% of the island, the rest dedicated to beaches and pleasure resorts.

Gamemaster's Note: The embassy on Bluefall's Kamina island, while small, serves as a clearing house of intelligence for StarMech's Security Consulate throughout the Verge, as this site provides easier access to many sources close to all of the stellar nations.

Thuldan Empire

The Thuldan imperative to unite all of humanity seems magnified in Andrew Stott, the Thuldan ambassador to Bluefall. As the most Earth-like world ever colonized by the Stellar Ring, Bluefall is a prize that Thuldan Emperor Regist wishes to call his own. The Thuldan attacks on Tribane Island in 2498 showed the typical Thuldan bullying tactics that gained them so much of the Stellar Ring, but to everyone's surprise but Vergers, Regency forces summarily destroyed their invasion fleet. Few citizens of Bluefall trust any Thuldans after this initial strike, though the tourist industry still accepts their credits with smiles as more Thuldans visit.

Despite the attack and little respect accorded to her representatives, the Regency allowed the Thuldans the second-largest island on Bluefall. While most questioned the tactic, Hale, Oliver Mohan, and Commander Kalden all agreed that giving the Empire that bone would prevent a counterstrike from the Stellar Ring that could easily destroy the Regency, regardless of Concord aid. In the interests of preventing another Galactic War over Aegis (and by extension, the Verge), the Thuldans gained the strategic territory and the position of the third most influential power within the Aegis system.

Gamemaster's Note: While Project Nereid becomes compromised in the *Deep Cover* adventure Thuldan leaders on Bluefall decide to eliminate any evidence of its development of the "gillmen," they maintain the results and soon begin again at another site. In addition, they have pursued other scientific breakthroughs as well. The recent tropical storm "Margo" (see *Threats from Beyond*) that devastated part of Filtrane Island in 2501 was the product of secret Thuldan experiments at weather control (potential PL8 technology). The goal is to technologically manipulate wind, moisture, and air pressure within a limited radius and then unleash the effect into the local environment. While the accident incurred much damage, the research continues and Bluefall could see more wild weather until the technology is either perfected or destroyed by outsiders. As a final solution to conquering Bluefall, scientists at Project Donar logged a memo to Ambassador Stott noting they could unleash massive tsunamis and hurricanes across Bluefall with a month's notice to wipe all other colonies off the islands, though they would need serious changes to settlement structure to ensure the survival of the Thuldan cities.

VoidCorp

VoidCorp's interests in the Aegis system, unlike most of the others, are not centered on Bluefall but around Redcrown. The company's gas mine begins full operations at the end of 2502, though many say the size of the mining platform and its loading docks make it closer to a military outpost and staging area. The Norokov facilities hold its embassy and numerous scientific think tanks (as well as communications with its AI computers hidden all about the sea floor of Bluefall—see Deep Cover for more information). Norokov also has automated perimeter defenses more deadly than any naval response forces, and they are equally effective against ships at sea as well as invading personnel.

Gamemaster's Note: As a future plot hook for home campaigns, infrequent checks of interstellar communications signals by the Regency outpost Research Station Echo detect brief, infrequent communications being sent from VoidCorp Mining Platform VA-10391 to parts and parties unknown.

The VORL AI computer and its Voidnet in the adventure continues its infiltration and compromise of the AeGrid's security, though skilled gridpilots may notice this activity once the AeGrid is fully active.

Alien Powers

Nonhumans make up 10% of the citizens within the Aegis system, though not all the known aliens call Aegis home in equal numbers. The sesheyans and mechalus are the smallest demographic groups on Bluefall, while recent changes have altered the population balance among the other three races. While the amount of fraal remains stable, the t'sa now account for 24% of the total alien population, which puts them behind the fraal at 30% of the aliens.

The Fraal

By far the most numerous of the aliens on Bluefall, fraal of all kinds have settled Bluefall either as members of the Concord or by joining the Regency upon immigration. Many recent émigrés are Mindwalkers seeking to assist the

Diplomatic Immunities

The Regency and Christopher Hale rule Bluefall and

10 km aquatic perimeter around the island that extends in all directions.

izens and visitors on Bluefall. They also have the

extreme example.

- Ambassadors and representatives are not wholly

other than their own stellar nation. Thus, the

home nation court can actually try them. The worst

personally out of the Aegis system, forcing the

Regency as best they may, though just as many find the water world fascinating and study the psionics of numerous aquatic species from the Moore's shark to dolphins and the occasional chance meeting of a deepfallen. While there are no independent fraal colonies on any of Bluefall's islands, there are scattered homesteads or camps of a single fraal or a mated pair; most remain on islands held by the Concord, the Orion League, or the Regency.

Gamemaster's Note: The fraal have built a mindwalker monastery on Sommers Atoll that provides psionic instruction to any they find worthy of training. A number of the priests and Mindwalkers therein secretly work with the Regency and help train the Regency Mindwalkers (who are always sent here anonymously and independently of one another, to hide their actual numbers.)

The T'sa

With the arrival of The Guardian over a year ago and its recent return with additional settlers, the t'sa population of Bluefall has exploded, doubling in less than three years. The Regency granted them the island of Rehja for their colonies, and it has quickly become the site of frenzied activity. Rehja's shipyards have already gained the Clutch some notice. While they do not build any ships, the t'sa provide fast and reliable ship repair, though it is slightly more expensive than normal repairs (add 20% to costs, but reduce time by 25%).

Gamemaster's Note: T'sa advances in subaquatic propulsion units, oxygen rebreathers, and subaquatic weaponry are solely adapted for t'sa physiology, but they are nonetheless kept quite secret from any stellar nations and non-t'sa. Gamemasters are encouraged to add any new leaps in aquatic technology to the t'sa that is appropriate. If the t'sa bond with the deepfallen, their quicker minds may allow for many breakthroughs in understanding between the landed and sea species. Of course, this contact then becomes mired in the politics of exposure to the Concord and the T'sa Cluster and the Regency, which tries to keep the information to itself.

The Weren

The weren may soon see increases in their populations as well, given the increased interest by the Orlamu and the celebrity wedding of the Regency's most highly decorated alien—Commander Kalden—and Commander Rataza Krayjal, an Orlamu weren. Talks have begun with the Regency to anticipate an influx of weren from the Stellar Ring. The Orlamu have initiated negotiations to stake out a small island to become New Kurg, allowing the weren to settle. This small island off the coast of Jort has undergone some minor terraforming but no development beyond that.

Externals

The blix are the only confirmed external species present in any numbers within the Aegis system. Though hardly more than 400 exist on Bluefall, this planet holds the largest concentration of these creatures in known space. Since their rather peculiar arrival on Bluefall in 2486, the Regency (and secret missions by the Thuldans, StarMech, and Orlamu as well) has sought the wreckage of their destroyed vessel. No such wreckage has ever been recovered, not even the escape pods the blix emerged from, which self-destructed quickly, leaving the blix to swim to their rescuers.

Gamemaster's Note: The blix spherical ship and its escape pods shares many similarities with kroath ships but was not filled with suspension fluids. The only remnants that might be recovered come from more than a mile beneath the surface, recovered by allied deepfallen, and the only clues discernible from them are a wider array of biocircuitry and organic technology than any humans have ever seen. Deepfallen, however, seem to have an innate fear or aversion to this wreckage, and they will not retrieve more than a tiny piece to appease their new allies. In truth, the deepfallen gathered more than 90% of all the wreckage and pushed it all into deep-sea trenches, from which none of it can be retrieved.

Chapter Seven: Regency Heroes

The Regency's citizens fulfill the same sorts of professional roles as do any others across the known worlds. This brief chapter adds a few new careers to the expanding list of those available to Star*Drive or Alternity players. They are not necessarily limited to characters from Aegis, but in some cases, Gamemasters and players may need to make a few adjustments to use these templates for heroes of other nations. For example, there is no reason that a player creating a heavy infantry hero could not use the Powered Infantry career as a base for a StarMech Power Trooper; simply adjust as necessary.

Game Benefits

[illegible] ...ialty skills.

In addition to the above bonus, all heroes of [illegible] noted for their ability to look at a problem and come up with a unique solution that has been overlooked by others.

Additional Careers

The unusual civilization of Bluefall has resulted in the formation of many new and different professions. Some of these are found only in the Regency, while others simply serve to better illustrate the people of this exceptional planet. Gamemasters should feel free to add some or all of these to their campaigns, keeping in mind that citizens of Bluefall should certainly have access to them.

Combat Spec: Powered Infantry

While the average Regency of Bluefall soldier is very much like that of any other nation, the warriors of the elite Powered Infantry Command are fast gaining a reputation for valor and heroism unmatched in the Verge. The benchmarks of a powered infantryman are his excellent training, unswerving loyalty, and determination to complete his mission at all costs.

The basic training given to every member of the Powered Infantry Command acquaints them with the powered armor that keeps them alive on the hellish battlefields of the 26th Century. In addition, the Regency trains its elite soldiers in the precise use of modern heavy weapons and the deadly quantum rifle. This training is tough. Most of those who begin it wash out long before the final exam. Only the most determined can complete the training. All told, a member of the Powered Infantry Command is a fierce opponent from the moment he leaves basic training.

Signature Equipment: Quantum rifle, body tank, rations, survival gear.

Skill Package: Armor Operation–*powered armor 2;* Modern Ranged Weapons–*rifle 2;* Heavy Weapons–*direct fire, indirect fire;* Resolve. Cost: 41 points.

Diplomat (Tech Op): Xenopsychologist

The xenopsychologist is an unusual individual who has dedicated himself to the challenging, perhaps even impossible, task of understanding how an alien creature thinks. It is not too difficult to come up with a broad categorization of an alien species: The weren are big, hairy, and aggressive, the t'sa are energetic, intelligent, and determined, and so on. These hardly do justice to the depths of an alien mind. And yet, if humans are to survive and prosper in the Verge, they must predict with some certainty the goals, methods, and thinking of countless external species.

In order to understand how an alien mind works, an individual must first understand the human mind. Only those who know their own mental abilities, limitations, and prejudices have any success in this field. Thus, the initial training of any xenopsychologist includes detailed study of the human mind. In addition to this training, a student of xenopsychology needs to be something of a diplomat himself and have a natural sense of intuition.

Of course, even this extensive training won't ensure that the xenopsychologist is successful. Only time and effort enable someone to fully immerse in the subtle fabric of an alien culture—and that can be a dangerous undertaking.

Signature Equipment: Computer gauntlet, holorecorder, comm gear.

Skill Package: Life Science–*xenology 2;* Medical Science–*psychology 2;* Culture–*diplomacy, first encounter;* Awareness–*intuition.* Cost: 35 points.

Free Agent: Regency Enforcer

Regency police officials have a somewhat different structure from most of the metropolitan police agencies in settled Old Space. In the Regency, a benevolent dictatorship, they are part of the military, and as such have requirements that cross

between military police duties and the maintenance of civilian order

The baseline uniformed patrol officers is detailed below. For those players who whish to advance their heroes in the criminal investigation departments, it would be worth adding other skills to the hero's repertoire. Unarmed Combat or Acrobatics skills are handy for those times one cannot carry a nightstick. Movement–race is useful for chasing down suspects on foot. Security–protection protocols for witness protection and Investigate–search and track for stakeouts round out some of the more useful investigator skills. And nearly every cop wants to develop that sixth sense for danger, making Awareness–intuition almost a necessity.

Signature Equipment: Bushmaster carametal mail (see the STAR*DRIVE Arms & Equipment Guide), 11mm charge pistol or stutter pistol, handcuffs, pulse baton, comm gear, sensor gauntlet, imaging goggles.

Skill Package: Armor Operation; Melee Weapons–powered; Ranged Weapons, Modern–pistol, rifle; Vehicle Operation–land vehicle or water vehicle; Law–law enforcement, Resolve. Cost:: 45 points.

Free Agent: Sailor

With the advent of gravitational technology, vehicles like the skytank make most land-, sea-, and aircraft obsolete. Despite this, certain high performance or specialty craft remain, like the military aircraft detailed elsewhere in this book or the racing hydrofoils commonly seen off the shores of Bluefall's many islands. As practical as an anti-gravity cruise liner might be, the romantic nostalgia of a seagoing vessel seems to appeal to many people. This is especially true on worlds like Bluefall, where dry land appears to be little more than an afterthought.

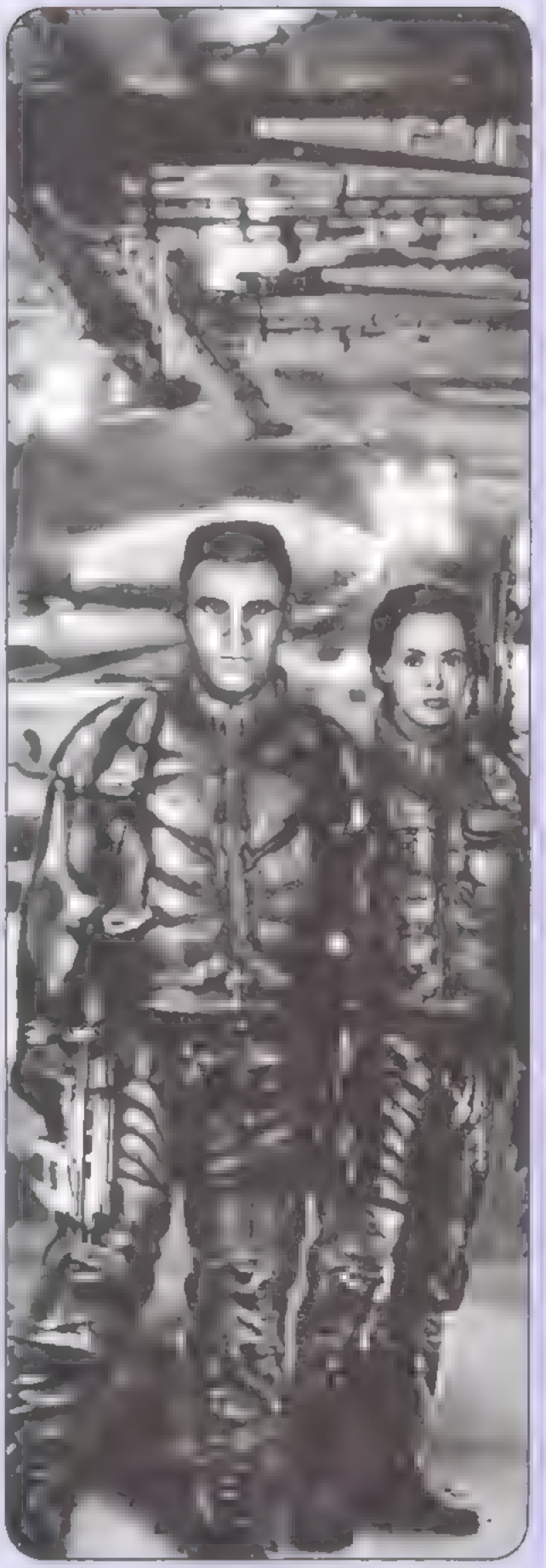
The sailor envisioned here might be one of the crew aboard a commercial fishing vessel or someone who has found work with an oceanographic institute. In unusual cases, they might even be from backwater systems.

Signature Equipment: Sensor gauntlet, life vest, climate weave

Skill Package: Movement–*swim 2*; Survival; Vehicle Operation–*water vehicle 2*, Navigation–*surface navigation*. Cost: 26 points.

Tech Op: Marine Biologist

The seas of Bluefall hold a bewildering array of life. In the short span of time humans and other sentient species have lived on Bluefall, they have but scratched the surface in identifying underwater plants and animals. It is the role of the marine biologist to continue those efforts. As with any role, these package skills listed below are but a start. In addition to improving science skills, the marine biologist may wish to pick up some weapon skills, for not all the denizens of the deep are friendly. Furthermore, firsthand experience is often as valuable as lab or tank work, so Acrobatics–daredevil for scuba work or Armor Operation–powered armor for deep-



sea work might be worth picking up. Any knowledge of Survival–survival training (underwater) can help keep a hero alive in this foreign environment. Finally, a biologist will want to know how to get around using Vehicle Operation–water.

Signature Equipment: Sensor gauntlet, laptop computer with appropriate databases on it or accessible by it, required survival gear.

Skill Package: Knowledge–computer operation; Life Science–biology, botany 2, genetics, xenology, zoology 2; Physical Science–chemistry, planetology; Movement–swimming, Animal Handling Cost: 40 points.

Tech Op: Underwater Construction Specialist

On a planet that has only 2% total land surface, sentient inhabitants must look to the seafloor for future housing. Since the Regency formed shortly after arriving at Bluefall, it has looked to just such a future. Where it could not find such specialists among their own people, it eventually brought them in from elsewhere. Now, the Regency's undersea construction capabilities are the best in the Verge. These specialists find plenty of work on their own world, but they occasionally find lucrative employment on other worlds as well.

Such specialists find themselves in many different circumstances and job descriptions, and no single set of skills presented here will meet all of those circumstances. In addition to those listed below, underwater construction specialists may wish to add, at their need and convenience, these other skills as well: Acrobatics–daredevil (for scuba diving), Demolitions–set explosives (for clearing obstacles), Survival–survival training (underwater), Stamina–endurance, Resolve, and Vehicle Operation–water vehicle. Other skills will likely come in handy as well, but these seem most appropriate to the tasks facing these construction specialists.

Signature Equipment: Hard E-suit or stripped down civilian body tank (either with a trauma pack II), comm gear, specialized toolkit, GPS receiver, and sensor gauntlet.

Skill Package: Technical Science–invention, jurying, repair 2, technical knowledge: construction 2; Movement–swim 2; Armor Operation–powered armor; Acrobatics–underwater training (new skill—see Chapter 5: Underwater Technology in this book). Cost:: 47 points.

Tech Op: Xenoarchaeologist

It is generally accepted that the Verge is an area of inestimable potential. The hand of an ancient people has left it with a wealth of habitable worlds and ruins where untold secrets await humanity's curious mind. While some are interested in the vast resources available in the Verge, others are more discerning. These are the xenoarchaeologists, experts who seek to reconstruct the vanished civilizations of the Precursors and other vanished cultures.

In some cases, these men and women are scholarly and docile, seeking knowledge for the sake of learning itself. Others, however, are more interested in an economic reward for their efforts. They seek objects that bring a hefty price from the museums of old space. A scarce few want even more than wealth. They are convinced that the secrets of the Precursors can ease people's suffering–or make them kneel down in obedience.

Signature Equipment: Computer gauntlet, climate weave.

Skill Package: Knowledge–*computer operation, deduce;* Life Science–*xenology 2;* Physical Science; Culture, Movement–*trailblazing.* Cost: 30 points.

Mindwalker: Psi Commando

In the last months of 2499, Regent Hale directed the Regency Intelligence Agency and Army to begin recruiting mindwalkers for service in a new military unit. When he publicly announced the formation of this unit in 2501, his plan was met with mixed results. Many people feared that the 118th Psychological Operations Battalion would become a state-run thought police. Although these voices have gradually grown less prominent, the unit is not popular on Bluefall.

The public need not fear, however. Despite the fact that they have been somewhat vilified by the press, all members of the 118th have been carefully screened. Before any potential recruit goes into training, the RIA conducts a thorough background investigation on that person. Any evidence of corruption excludes the candidate from recruitment. After initial contact is made, the recruit is subject to a complete psychological evaluation–including a deep psionic probe. With such safeguards in place, it is very difficult for anyone of questionable character to slip through the cracks. Without exception, the 118th PsyOps troops are loyal and dedicated to the betterment of humanity.

Although the members of 118th are technically members of the Regency Army, they seldom see duty as actual soldiers. Rather, they are employed as troubleshooters. The Rangers recognize that they must operate without the public support. In many cases, this means that they must work outside the law. To these steel nerved commandos, however, that's just the way things are. The important thing is that, in the end, justice is served.

In addition to receiving extensive training in the fundamental use of their psionic talents, members of the 118th are taught the ways of the warrior. They are comfortable in physical as well as mental combat. One way or another, the soldier of the 118th knows he must do whatever it takes to accomplish his mission.

Signature Equipment: Laser pistol or SMG, CF softsuit (thermal weave), comm gear.

Skill Package: Choose two psionic broad skills to represent the character's base training (players who have access to the *Mindwalkers* sourcebook may choose Psychoportation as one of their primary broad skills). In addition, these soldiers must learn the usual soldier skills, including Modern Ranged Weapons, Heavy Weapons, Stealth, Unarmed Attack, and other such skills. These soldiers continue to train when not engaged in missions; thus the addition of relevant skills continues long into their careers. Cost: variable.

Chapter Eight: Deep Cover

Bluefall—wonder of the Verge, with its Earth like biosphere and wondrous oceans. It's the place people from hundreds of light-years away come for the beauty and peace of its islands and oceans. But what else lurks beneath its waves?

Deep Cover is an adventure that shows heroes the many things that make Bluefall and Aegis the center of the Verge from most perspectives. The stellar nations and their politics make their presence known. The geography and unique aspects of Bluefall also figure greatly in the story, as do its technological shortfalls. Finally the mysterious deepfallen also play a part.

This adventure assumes the heroes are low to mid-level characters, though the setup can drastically change how well the heroes can handle the situations they encounter. While structured in three acts, *Deep Cover* can easily expand far beyond a simple three-act scenario. The potential adventures linked to this one provide clues that lead to greater threats. And, while the adventure that follows can easily made part of a larger ongoing campaign theme, there's still a sense of accomplishment for the heroes if they go no further than solve the crisis described in this adventure.

Background

Since the end of the Second Galactic War, the stellar nations had slowly returned to the Verge and to its most treasured colonies in the Aegis system. Despite the fears surrounding the Vanishing, Aegis remained the center of the Verge and the hub around which that region of space spun. The Regency had restored Bluefall and the rest of Aegis to a working system again, and with the return of the stellar nations, many issues old and new arose in waves.

Bluefall, as the most desirable piece of real estate in the Verge (or anywhere off Earth, in some eyes), became the board on which all the strategic games and power plays were played. In 2497, the Concord reestablished contact with Aegis and the Regency, heralding a flood of Stellar Nation immigration to the system over the next year. By the end of 2498, every major power of the Stellar Ring would claim territory on Bluefall, and not all of it diplomatically.

While most immigration occurred peacefully, like the Orlamu Theocracy's purchase of Jort, some aggressors tried a more forceful approach to their regret. The Thuldan Empire's assault on Regency Island was both ill conceived and totally unnecessary. In their usual heavy-handed style, the Thuldans chose to assert their "rights" to the best resources by taking it from the Regency which, while seen by the Concord as an autonomous state, was not a recognized power they needed to respect. By the end of the conflict, the Thuldans grudgingly gave their respect to the Regency forces that so soundly defeated them at Regency Island. While calmer heads finally prevailed and the Thuldans became ensconced on Filtrane Island, there are many on Bluefall whose tempers have not yet cooled. Indeed, while the Thuldans are the example, they were and are not alone in their contempt for the upstart Regency

There is bad blood between the Regency and the Thuldans, however cloaked in diplomacy, and any secrets held by one are fair game for the other. For the intervening four years, Thuldan leaders and scientists have worked toward finding out the Regency's great secrets and using them against the upstart Verge power. At the same time, Regency forces have played a careful game of cooperation and compromise in order to keep the strife and conflict of another galactic war out of the Verge and specifically away from Aegis. The mysteries of the Vanishing and the Deepfallen are closely guarded, but the sweeter the secret, the more flies seek it out.

All of the stellar nations have both sovereign island embassies and territorial waters in a 20-kilometer radius around their islands. They also have embassy buildings on Hughes Island, and those are where they meet with other powers to discuss the crises of the day. The Regency provided all of these concessions in exchange for the Concord's guarantee that Aegis would not become a singular prize over which all the nations would fight. Instead, it has put Bluefall at the center of a web of intrigues that spans more than 2,000 light-years. Bluefall is the forum where nations settle their conflicts with each other simply so neither loses the benefits of their footholds in the Verge.

In a curious situation of détente, Bluefall has become the center of Verge activity for all nations, and while many seek to gain the upper hand politically or economically, few wish to upset the apple cart. Of course, there are always a few bad apples in the bunch . . . without whom our heroes would have no foes.

Plot Overview

This plot revolves around someone being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Not only do the heroes find themselves caught up in someone else's problem, but it was someone discovering something he shouldn't have that set these events in action. Michael Taron, Dr. Artemus Vych's son-in-law, had developed a psychic skill that allowed him to mentally connect with computers (Telepathy–*datalink*). During the testing phases of the new AeGrid, Michael discovered an entirely separate Grid, run by a VoidCorp artificial intelligence (AI). He fled, but not before this AI, VORL, discovered who he was. He sent an agent, a modified Nariac cybermariner fitted with a telepresence link and an internal memory harness, to see to it that Michael and any other who might know never got the chance to tell anyone else. VORL also made sure that no information remained on Islvych by engineering the "security breach" that gets the Thuldan strike teams scrambled and headed for the island. In the confusion, VORL plans to send

the cybermariner to ensure nothing is left of any data storage systems—or anyone carrying them!

Deep Cover is a three-act adventure with at least two scenes per act. They're not absolutely linear in terms of moving from one scene to the next, so Gamemasters should read the entire adventure through once to become familiar with the plot. Once a Gamemaster knows what may occur during the game, juggling the order of events becomes simpler.

Act I brings the heroes to Bluefall for whatever purpose suits the Gamemaster's campaign, and opens with some excitement over the new Grid being tried out across the system. Soon interrupting the festivity, the wreck of the *Adler's Pride* draws the heroes into a number of plots from which many adventures can spring. Others join the action, though it's hard to say who's a friend and who's not. While little can be done for the men killed in the shipwreck, the heroes may help save three others, including the famed gengineer Artemus Vych. Because of the extent of the victims' wounds, the heroes must take them to Vych's island estate, which has a complete medical facility.

Act II takes place on the Vych estate and provides a few answers, as well as more questions. While guests there, the heroes can investigate the crash and learn other things simply by asking a few questions. They also find that the newly upgraded Aegis Grid does not yet have all of its security protocols in place, as someone manages to steal Thuldan secrets and makes it appear the heroes were the ones to do it. The Thuldan response comes in the form of a force of warlions!

Act III reveals what the warlions are after: the destruction of their secret gillmen project, which utilizes the corpses of deepfallen! Forced to flee his home in the Empire to prevent being killed by his own people, Vych has lived in relative isolation here on Bluefall, where he works to perfect the gillman design. Set against a background of violent combat and narrow escapes, this information is not immediately obvious to the heroes, although when they see the dissected deepfallen in its vat, they will certainly understand why the Thuldans are so aggressive in fulfilling their mission. The Thuldans are not the only ones who have an interest in the place, as the heroes discover when they meet a strange cybermariner below in Vych's research outpost.

Throughout all three acts, there are numerous places where heroes or characters alike could trip across the clues and details that would expose the true culprits at work here. If not, the adventure ends with the feeling that the Thuldans protect their secrets at all costs, even by putting out contracts on their own, and the heroes helped bring those secrets out by being in the wrong place at the right time. If the clues are picked up, other games could follow the trail of an AI buried many fathoms beneath the waves of Bluefall.

Getting the Heroes Involved

What's the incentive for the heroes to get involved in *Deep Cover?* Well, that entirely depends on the players and the Gamemaster, and the starting point often sets the tone of the heroes' investment to the scenario.

The heroes can simply be in the wrong place at the right time, and events cascade around them at a dizzying pace as they're swept up in a gauntlet of intrigues not their own. Simply surviving is an accomplishment, while putting all the pieces in place is the mark of great heroes. Act I Scene 1 starts with this assumption and the heroes on vacation where they'll encounter far worse than sunburn. . . .

Heroes who work for RIA, REC, or CIB could easily be worked into this scenario at different stages. Perhaps Mr. Vych has been under surveillance for a long time, and the accident with his boat simply gives agents a way in at the Vych estate or it forces them into blowing their cover to rescue Vych, as they can't let him die until they know all he knows.

The heroes could be working with the Regency or Alan Quinn and the CIB trying to track down rogue RIA agents. Alternatively, they could be working with Donald Gettys in trying to infiltrate Islvych (though they will not know of their comrade's duplicity).

Heroes with no strong allegiances to stellar nations or the Regency could get dragged into the adventure by a number of methods. Utilizing the trial Grid and effectively spotting some of what the AI is up to immediately make that hero a target. The heroes could be traveling across the waves of Bluefall heading to something else entirely and they could come under attack just as the *Adler's Pride* did.

For some heroes, any of these challenges would see them diving headlong into danger. Others may follow the mystery to find out why someone wants them (or someone else) dead. Still others might investigate out of a sense of duty, helping to maintain the sociopolitical status quo. However they get involved, the Gamemaster should adjust the activities to best suit the style of play or goals of the players and their heroes.

Supporting Cast

Aside from the heroes getting involved, there are a number of very important characters with whom they'll interact for much of the adventure (or in later adventures). They are listed in order of appearance.

Alan Quinn "Lieutenant, REC" / (Lieutenant, CIB)

Level 12 Free Agent

STR 9	INT 10
DEX 11(+2)	WIL 10
CON 10	PER 12
Durability. 10/10/5	Action Check: 13+/12/6/3
Move sprint 20, run 12, walk 4	#Actions. 2
Reaction Score Ordinary	Last Resorts. 3
Perks. Great Looks	Flaws None

Attacks

Unarmed	12/6/3	d6s/d6+1s/d6+2s	LI/0
Ninja 600 Laser pistol*	12/6/3	d4+1w/d6+1w//d4m	En/0
Condor X7 Stutter pistol	12/6/3	d6+3s/d8+3s/d12+3s	LI/0

* –d4 base situation die

Skills

Athletics [9]–*climb [10]*; Unarmed Attack [9]–*power martial arts [12]*; Acrobatics [11]–*dodge [13]*; Modern Ranged Weapons [11]–*pistol [12]*, Stealth [11]–*shadow [12], sneak [13]*; Vehicle Op [11]–*water (power boats) [12], water (gravskis) [12]*; Movement [10]–*swim [12]*; Stamina [10]–*endurance [11]*; Survival [10], Knowledge [10]–*computer operation [11], deduce [12], first aid [11]*; Security [10]–*security devices [11]*; Awareness [10]–*intuition [12], perception [13]*; Investigate [10]–*search [13]*; Entertainment [12] *act [16]*, Interaction [12]–*charm [14], intimidate [13], seduce [13]*; Leadership [12].

Alan is an affable and charismatic individual, no matter what he's up to. Of Orion heritage, he is the son of a couple who volunteered for Concord service after GW2 and became citizens shortly thereafter. Alan is one of CIB's best agents; his versatility and ability to pull together a workable plan where others would find only panic has served him well over his career. He's loyal to the Concord and truly believes he's helping the dream of Pax Concordia move forward. Social responsibility is rare in a CIB agent, but it hasn't hampered Quinn at all.

An accomplished actor and undercover agent, Alan can assume any character traits he wishes and can be whatever he needs to be to accomplish his missions. At heart, though, Alan is less a spy than a hero. He's doing all this for the dream of peace, not for the inside scoop on secrets. Nothing angers him more than someone "just following orders" or doing their jobs just for the money and perks, as he wants his coworkers and allies to be different from those they're keeping in check.

Alan's true mission at Parr-Ylham, while technically a vacation, was to ferret out some RIA agent or agents in the area who are believed to be funneling information to other interested parties. More likely that not, Alan's cover will allow him to perform his duty without identifying himself as an agent (though if it's a matter of life or death, he will call in some favors or even call upon direct Concord aid).

Les Dybrol/V0-RL98316 ("V0RL") VoidCorp Artificial Intelligence

"It is astonishing that those who have the capability to build magnificences such as this one can so easily be blinded by misdirection and petty concerns over political agendas.
V0-RL98316

The true villain of this adventure VoidCorp Artificial Intelligence V0-RL98316--V0RL for short--makes no true appearance in these scenarios, though it does act through its puppets. Its hardware lies among the darker depths of the oceans northeast of the Tower.

The statistics provided are for an enslaved Narnac cybermariner once named Les Dybrol. The AI wants the heroes and others to believe that the cybermariner is actually the mastermind of this whole assassination plot. While it regrets having to use so much force to cover up its existence, what little has come to light has its enemies seeking cybernetic men and sharks, not an AI controlling all of them behind the scenes.

Formerly a Level 5 Combat Spec (Level 21 AI)

STR 13 (+1)	INT 9/18[1] (0/+4)
DEX 11 (+1)	WIL 9/13[1] (0/+2)
CON 11	PER 7/11[1]
Durability: 11/11/6	Action Check. 14+/13/6/3
Move sprint 24, run 16, walk 6[2]	#Actions: 2
Reaction Score: Ordinary	Last Resorts. 0

[1] Controlling AI statistics
[2] Easy swim 6, swim 9

Attacks

Unarmed	14/7/3	d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s	LI/0
Aqualaser rifle	13/6/3	d4+1w/d6+1w/d4m	En/0

Defenses

Body plating (Good) d6 (LI), d4+1 (HI), d4+1 (En)

Skills (Les

Athletics [13]; Unarmed Attack [13]–*brawl [14]*; Ranged Weapons [11]–*pistol [12], rifle [13]*; Stealth [11]; Vehicle Operation [11], Movement [11]–*swim [15]*; Stamina [11], Demolitions [9/18]–*set explosives [10/19]*; Knowledge [9/18]; Awareness [9/13], Investigate [9/13]–*interrogate [10/14], search [10/14], track [10/14]*; Interaction [7/11].

Skills (V0RL)

AI Functions [18] *multitask [24], prediction [20], remote [22]*; Computer Science [18]–*hacking [24], hardware [26], programming [24]*; Knowledge [18]–*deduce [20]*; Navigation [18]–*astrogation, drivespace [20], astrogation, system [20], navigation, surface [20]*; Physical Science [18]–*astro-*

omy [20], chemistry [19], physics [20], planetology [20], Security [18]–*protection protocols [24], security devices [24];* System Operation [18]–*communications [26], sensors [20];* Technical Science [18]–*repair [22], technical knowledge [24];* Administration [13]–*bureaucracy [16];* Awareness [13]–*perception [17];* Investigate [13]–*cryptography [20];* Street Smart [13]–*Grid savvy [20].*

Cyber Gear
Body plating (Good); cyberoptics (Amazing—allows AI to see out Les' eyes); nanocomputer (Amazing); neural interface jack (Good); optic screen (Amazing); AI memory harness (Amazing); comm gear–VORL's telepresence link (Amazing); retractable feet fins (+2 to swim rates); internal dive gauntlet (Ordinary), internal aqualungs (Good).

Equipment
Aqualaser rifle

Note: The aqualaser rifle emits light in a part of the spectrum that allows it will work effectively underwater. Its range is decreased to 80/320/800, although conditions for shots much above short range are rare underwater

Les Dybrol is effectively no more, as the AI now controls him fully through the Amazing-quality memory harness and the system link interface it grafted to his brain and torso. Most of his higher brain functions have ceased and his cybernetics have become the means by which VORL interacts with the world. While the physical skills are his own, the mental skills are limited to those given him at any time through the memory harness. The list of VORLs skills represents everything it knows. It is up to the Gamemaster to determine which ones are available to Les at a given time

The hapless Narac cybermariner accidentally discovered VORL's cybersharks over a year ago during his early deep dives, and followed them. While he sent messages to his superiors at Newlan City, they never arrived due to signal jamming by the curious AI. Les tracked their carrier signals back to VORLs datacore and CPU, where the AI used numerous defenses at its command to capture and enslave the cybermariner. Through VoidCorp, VORL has had a state-of-the-art cybernetic memory harness fitted to Les' neural structure. As a result, Les has become an exceedingly dangerous opponent. He has no status with VoidCorp, as they consider him part of VORL.

Item	PL	Mass	Size	O	G	A
Memory Harness	7+	2	3	10k	18k	28k

Expanding "VORL's" Influence

If Gamemasters wish to expand the role of VO-RL98316 in their campaigns, they should know a few more facts. Here are the canonical details on the VoidCorp AI, which may be expanded in the future by Gamemasters.

New Skill: Cryptography

can't be used untrained

step bonus to skill checks to decode. (Marginal codes

skill. Ordinary codes apply no modifier to decoding

sonal computer systems—little more than alphanu-

while to cycle through. Good codes include block or stream ciphers and apply a +1 step penalty to decod-

of chaos theory and apply a +3 step penalty to attempts to solve them.

provides a bonus of –1, –2, or –3 steps to the *cryptography* skill check.

improves. At rank 4, he gains a –1 step bonus to

rank 8 and –3 steps at rank 12

reproduced here.

VoidCorp's 'ill luck' at losing numerous seacraft and transports in Bluefall's sea storms or crashes on coral reefs cover the fact that these crashes deploy waterproofed mainframe payloads into the oceans at strategic locations. Of the 25 gravbarges and other ships lost by VoidCorp, 8 of them deposited scanner-shielded technology beneath the waves, acting as listening posts or as AI mainframes.

VoidCorp built VO-RL98316 with multiple redundant systems to oversee and manage the VoidNet it secretly built on Bluefall as a plant to infiltrate whatever new Grid the Regency would eventually install. VoidCorp's own particular bid and proposed Grid was both purposefully high in cost and low in perceived return, which allowed them to temporarily link with many Regency computers and pass some codes onto the VoidNet.

The AI has three separate but equally massive mainframes scattered about the sea floor of Bluefall, the destruction of any two of them does no more than reduce the nearly unlimited number of memory slots available to it.

A fourth and fifth subaquatic mainframe provides the storage and structure of VoidCorp's information network and its secret shadow paralleling of the AeGrid. The AI has full and total access to the VoidNet and has established hundreds of careful links within the AeGrid, allowing some activities from that Grid be unwittingly copied onto the VoidNet and its databanks. Often, the only noticeable clue within the AeGrid can be spotted by an Amazing success at an Awareness–*intuition* skill check. In appropriate places on the Aegrid, a Gridshadow's virtual shadow either flickers slightly or has a slight haze effect to its pixelation. Actively analyzing and diagnosing the pattern disruption may reveal the existence of VORL's infiltration of the AeGrid.

Artemus Vych
Thuldan Gengineer

Level 16 Tech Op

STR 9	INT 14 (+2)
DEX 10	WIL 12 (+1)
CON 9	PER 12
Durability: 9/9/5	Action Check: 14+/13/6/3
Move: sprint 18, run 12, walk 4	#Actions: 2
Reaction Score: Ordinary	Last Resorts: 2

Attacks

Unarmed	4/2/1	d4s/d4+1s/d4+2s	LI/0
Stutter Pistol (Falcon T9)	11/5/2	d6+2s/d8+2s/d8+4s	LI/0

Skills

Athletics [9]; Ranged Weapons [10]–*pistol [11]*; Vehicle Operation [10]–*water (power boats) [13]*; Stamina [9]; Business [14]; Knowledge [14]–*computer operation [16], deduce [17]*; Life Science [14]–*biology [20], genetics [22], xenology [17], zoology [17]*; Medical Science [14]–*medical knowledge [18], surgery [19], treatment [17]*; Physical Science [14]–*chemistry [18]*, Administration [12], Awareness [12]–*perception [15]*; Resolve [12]–*mental resolve [15]*; Culture [12]–*diplomacy [14], etiquette (Thuldan) [15]*; Interaction [12]–*charm [13], intimidate [14]*

Mutations

Enhanced Intelligence: +2 INT
Enhanced Will: +2 WIL
Improved Personality: +1 PER
Drawback–Moderate Environmental Sensitivity–Arid conditions: +3 step modifier to any actions taken while in an arid environment

This 81-year-old man (who appears no more than his early 40s) is one of the Thuldan Empire's best gengineers–designers of mutants. For more than 25 years, Vych has helped developed many mutagenic adaptations for use across the Empire. His crowning achievement has been the design and creation of the gillmen, though due to his son-in-law's accidental discovery of the VORL AI and its global network, he has become a hunted man.

Rich beyond compare, the Vych family fortune came from the GW2 mercenary trade (specifically mutant mercenaries), and Artemus put most of his inheritance into buying this island. While still technically a scientist within the Thuldan power structure, Vych money has bought enough Imperial influence to allow him to operate more or less independently.

His few superiors among the Ministry of Science though, have long objected to his establishing a private lab from which to develop the gillfolk. They consider it a security risk, and some embittered colleagues hope to use any problems at Outpost Nereid as excuses to pull the political rug out from under Artemus Vych. More rabid opponents find him such a political enemy that they consider assassination a viable option to deal with him. In fact, the second the security protocols are breached on the outpost computers, Vych's enemies use that excuse to send in the troops to remove all damaging evidence (especially Vych himself and his lab) "in the best interests of the Empire."

Donald Gettys
RIA Agent (VoidCorp Mole)

Level 8 Tech Op

STR 8	INT 13 (+2)
DEX 12 (+1)	WIL 10
CON 9	PER 8
Durability: 9/9/5	Action Check: 14+/13/6/3
Move: sprint 18, run 12, walk 4	#Actions: 2
Reaction Score: Ordinary/2	Last Resorts: 1

Attacks

Unarmed	10/5/2	d6s/d6+2s/d4w
Tornado 600 15mm sabot pistol	13/6/3	2d4w/2d4+1w/d4m

Skills

Athletics [8]; Unarmed Attack [8]–*power martial arts [10]*; Ranged Weapons [12]–*pistol [13], rifle [13]*; Stealth [12] Vehicle Operations [12]–*water (power boats) [13]*; Stamina [9]; Computer Science [13]–*hacking [18], hardware [15], programming [14]*, Knowledge [13]–*deduce [14]*; Security [13]–*security devices [14]*; Awareness [10]–*intuition [11]*; Investigate [10]–*interrogate [11]*; Street Smart [10]–*criminal knowledge [11], Grid savvy [12]*.

Cyber Gear

Wireless Neural interface jack (Good); nanocomputer (Good) neural 3D dataslot, external

Donald Gettys comes across immediately as arrogant, self-important, misogynistic, and supremely self-confident. He

treats others well only when they are of use to him, abandoning them without a thought soon after that. However much of his brash, loud and near idiotic persona is an act to get others to underestimate him. It also helps to be so annoying that people willingly ignore you and what you're up to, a tactic he has used well.

Donald Gettys is allegedly a RIA agent; actually, though, he works for the Regency Ministry of Security as a counter-intelligence agent. He has two Grid shadow identities through which he acts in an official capacity. He also has a third Grid shadow, the flamboyant "Spider," through which he pursues his personal agenda, getting rich through the sale of Regency secrets. Ironically, one of his secondary missions for RIA is to track down and capture Spider's controller for illegal Grid activity.

His current official RIA mission is to infiltrate Islvych and extract as much sensitive information about Thuldan operations as possible from Doctor Vych's computers and instantly transfer that info to waiting Regency operatives and shadow spies waiting on the AeGrid. What the RIA doesn't know is that their computer counter-espionage man has betrayed them.

Don accidentally uncovered the existence of the VORL AI months ago and opened a dialogue with it before it could destroy him or his Grid shadow. To their surprise, they forged an alliance of mutual needs. In a simple case of quid pro quo, Don provided certain limited Regency codes to the AI in exchange for access to some of its collected data. As Don's star rose among the Ministry based on cases solved with these secrets, he provided more codes to the AI so it could create the VoidNet shadowlinks with the AeGrid once it was fully activated. Despite his complicity, Don plans on betraying the AI at some point in the future, once he's covered all of his own tracks.

Another Option: Donald Gettys' true role in this plot remains a bit obscure. As far as the heroes and characters know, he plays all sides against the middle and works for more than just the agency he claims to work for. Even though the adventure has him allied with the VoidCorp AI, he could just as easily be a mole for the CIB and he's playing a good cop/bad cop routine with Alan Quinn at this point, both of them working to prevent various factions from assassinating Doctor Artemus Vych before they can help him disappear and join the Concord. (With this same twist, both agents could also be working for the Regency and trying to move Vych to the Depth Epsilon project with all of his research. . . .)

Jerry Garond
Islvych Security Chief

Level 13 Combat Spec/Thuldan Warbon

STR 13 (+2)	INT 9
DEX 11 (+1)	WIL 10
CON 11	PER 9
Durability: 11/11/6	Action Check: 14+/13/6/3
Move: sprint 24, run 16, walk 6	#Actions: 2
Reaction Score: Ordinary/2	Last Resorts: 1

Attacks

Unarmed Attack*	16/8/4	d6s/d6+2s/d4w	LI/0
Combat Knives	15/7/3	d4+1w/d4+2w/d4+3w	LI/0
Quant Rifle	14/7/3	d4+3w/d6+4w/d6+1m	En/0
Sabot Pistol	13/6/3	2d4w/2d4+1w/d4+3m	HI 0

* d4 base situation die

Defenses

–3 step bonus to all Stamina–*endurance* checks vs. mortal damage

Skills

Athletics [13]–*jump [14], throw [15];* Melee Weapon [13]–*blade [15], bludgeon [14], powered weapon [14];* Unarmed Attack [13]–*brawl [16],* Acrobatics [11]–*dodge [13];* Ranged Weapon [11]–*pistol [13]; rifle [14];* Vehicle Operation [11]; Stamina [11]–*endurance [12], resist pain [13],* Knowledge [9]–*deduce [10];* Demolitions[9] -*disarm [11], set explosives [11];* Security [9]–*protocols [12];* Awareness [10]–*intuition [13] perception [12];* Investigate [10]–*search [11];* Interaction [9,-*intimidate [11];* Leadership [9,.

Mutations

Enhanced Strength: +2 Strength

Redundant Vital Organs: Reduces mortal damage by half, –3 step bonus to Stamina–*endurance* checks related to mortal damage.

Night Vision· Reduces darkness penalties by 2 steps, assuming at least some ambient light

Drawback–Minor Physical Change: leonine muzzle

Drawback–Slight Reduced Ability (Intelligence): –1 Intelligence

Equipment

Garond carries at least four knives at any given time, using them to throw at targets. When outside the manor, he always carries his quantum rifle with him (in addition to his pistol and knives)

While he does actually use his first name among some friends, no one on Islvych other than Doctor Vych ever calls him Jerry—he's either "Chief" or "Garond." The broad-shouldered man has the tanned skin of someone who spends most of his time outdoors, and his hair is a wild mane of sun-bleached gold, as is his full beard. His leonine muzzle lies buried beneath his beard and moustache.

By nature, Garond is suspicious, aloof, and paranoid, attributes that suit him well in his profession of security. His sense of loyalty and friendship almost rival a t'sa, as he bonds cautiously but permanently to people he respects. He respects the doctor, though he does not like his spoiled daughter or her husband.

Most know the security chief is a bioengineered warbon, though few speak of it as his beard makes him look more human and he's good at what he does. Garond got his job protecting the doctor when he saved him from renegade mutant attackers on the flight out to the Verge three years ago and he's been well paid to keep Artemus safe. Truthfully he'd rather not work for the Thuldans, but they pay the best and ask the fewest questions concerning his origins. In the 21 months since Vych bought this island, more than seven attempts have been made on the doctor's life, all of them thwarted by either luck or Garond.

The Chief is proud of what he does, and he instills that same pride and loyalty in his guards. As a result, none of them have cared all that much for Michael Taron, a Thuldan aristocrat heir to some obscure duchy back in Old Space, and Ayla's husband. Michael made no secret of his distaste for Garond, slandering or taunting him often despite repeated warnings from his father-in-law. This animosity was why Garond wasn't on board the *Adler's Pride,* though he regrets it now and will stick close to Artemus and his daughter until they are out of danger

Other Supporting Cast Members

There are a number of other characters within this adventure, though many go unnamed or do not remain with the heroes for long. Still, they stand out from the crowds during the action, and their statistics and minor details need noting.

The Parr-Yllam Resort Staff

The resort staff at the Parr-Yllam resort islands is conscientious and friendly, and their security staff is quite accommodating to the heroes (especially if they are of any fame within the Aegis system or the Concord).

Angela, a character in Act I, is typical of the resort's security staff. She (and the rest of the security staff) uses the Marginal Law Enforcer template for their stats, though Angela's available equipment is noted where she appears.

Ayla Vych-Taron

Ayla is Artemus' youngest child and only daughter living out here in the Verge with him (two of his sons currently work for Thuldan concerns in Old Space). Ayla uses the Ordinary Corporate Executive template, and at age 19 she's managing a shipping company owned by her father's holding companies.

Surprisingly she has been illegally smuggling seshayans off of Shaya and out into the Verge, depositing them on Grith

or on Bluefall. She has no love for the aliens or their plight—Ayla merely did it because it annoyed a former suitor. With her recent marriage, she planned to buy out a number of other companies and establish a trading consortium controlled by her from her husband's Old Space duchy out to Bluefall. These plans will now be on hold.

Vych Estate Security Forces

There are 18–24 security guards working on Islvych at any given time. While some, like the Chief, are fully realized characters, most are akin to Stewart 'Buzz' Granger (Xm/Thuldan/CS2), the only conscious member of the crew on the wrecked *Adler's Pride*. The Security Guards on Islvych match Ordinary Soldier templates (with 2–4 Good officers).

Outpost Nereid Personnel

There are always five people on site at the outpost: three security personnel and two biotechnicians. The soldiers maintain and monitor the entrances and exits of the outpost and lock the place down against intruders. The two scientists keep watch over the gestation processes of the gillfolk and provide laboratory and technical updates to their superiors back on Filtrane and above to Doctor Vych's private office. A new quintet of technicians and security rotates on duty every five days, during which time they are not to leave the confines of the outpost, the relieved personnel leave the outpost via mini-sub, just as their replacements arrived.

The technicians are always an Amazing quality Doctor template and an Ordinary-quality Scientist assistant technician. The security personnel use the Good Soldier template and they are armed with stutter pistols and sabot pistols, with additional armaments in the outpost's lower levels. Each operates on 8 hours off, 16 hours on, with one soldier asleep at any time, the others on station.

Act I: Vacation

You and your companions have been hard at work in the Verge, and you've finally taken a well-deserved vacation. Where better to take a break than on Bluefall, the Paradise of the Verge? Through some amount of luck, pulled strings, and a bit of money, you've managed to get yourselves rooms at Trisera Island in the Parr Archipelago.

After the first few days, you've finally managed to relax and forget some of the troubles in the outside world. There are more than enough diversions here for your stay, not to mention the recent excitement over the restart of the AeGrid, which has undergone a major overhaul in the past 18 months. There are holocameras scattered everywhere across the resort islands, recording all the fun and activities for free advertising on the Grid.

Scene 1: R & VR

The Parr Archipelago contains 28 tiny islands at Aegis Navgrid coordinates G8D20-23, G8E19-22, G8F20-23, and G8G20-21. The islands are divided up and owned by four different corporations, all of which have opened up their island clusters as resorts. The resorts are respectively, Khalyr's Peace (9 islands), the Trannis Retreat (7), the Denaris Refuge (7), and Ylliam Resort (5). The resorts gain tax breaks as homesteads due to the lack of major industry and various concessions to the Regency.

The Parr-Ylliam resort islands are the northwesternmost islands of the chain, as seen in Map 2: Navgrid G8 Closeups. The Ylliam Resort islands gained fame as one of the best places for skindiving among Bluefall's beautiful coral shelves. The Ylliam shelves have only been altered and shaped to allow for only a few approach avenues to the islands; these are marked both on the surface and underwater and resort police strictly enforces them.

Spread across four of five islands, there are nine resort campuses at the Ylliam resort (and a tenth on the smallest island for employees only). Each of the resort campuses has at least one major hotel or lodgings and all attendant services for at least 600 people. Fees are paid up front for a week ($2200) or month's ($7500) stay, though the fee covers all expenses save private charters and tours not sponsored by the resort.

Much of the resort has been kept in the islands' natural states for rock climbers and hikers; docks and the resort buildings at each of the ten communities never expand beyond a quarter-kilometer radius from its central hotel or landmark.

You're all booked in one four-suite cabin among 36 in the Kahuna Beach hotel. The huts are crafted to look like palm-grass huts on the outside, though they have every modern luxury inside. Nine huts encircle a courtyard, three huts per side, and four of these such groups line the beach just at the northern edge of the Kahuna Campus. No huts have external locks, nor do the suites themselves, though keypad locks secure individual rooms, with codes known only to security and occupants.

While some of you disliked being separated from some of your gear, the resort confiscated all your weapons and military gear for the duration of your stay at Ylliam Resort. Resort security keeps them locked up in one location at each hotel where patrons are staying, releasing them only at checkout or by the order of the security chief. Gridcasting gear or cybergear is not confiscated, but the resort scanned all arriving patrons and keeps records of who carried what into the resort.

Some neighboring vacationers invite you on fishing or diving trips; others look for a few extra players for impromptu beach games (even the ancient Earth game of sand volleyball). Still others have been checking out

Isavych
Simaeilles
The Cutthroats
Herma
The Needle
The Zaerais
Each square equals 20 kilometers

the days old AeGrid while relaxing on the sand, since the resort is providing access via mirrorshades at some of the beachfront cabanas. As this is your fourth day of R&R, you've all had the chance to try out a few diversions, and you have enjoyed yourselves thoroughly.

Given the beautiful morning, the hotel served breakfast in the central courtyard outside your hut, where you saw other fellow vacationers. The usual round of invites and queries over activities starts up–What are your heroes up to today?

Gamemaster's Note: If the heroes are agents of the Regency Enforcement Command or Regency Intelligence Agency and they reveal said status to resort security, they are allowed to retain their weapons. The only stricture is that the weapons remain out of sight, preferably locked in their owners' rooms

Beach Activities

There is much to do if the heroes don't wish to leave the island. They can simply lie on the sand and enjoy the climate Games can be played all along the beach. A number of people also cluster around the beachfront bar, despite the time of day, intrigued by something

The bar seems to be the dispensary for renting Grid mirrorshades, and many folks are trying them on. The shades don't allow access other than taking a look at promotional sites detailing the new Grid being tested across Aegis for the next month. Most wearers passively watch a preprogrammed tour of the AeGrid and its services–in effect, a preview of how widespread AeGrid could become in the future The tour highlights offers of incredible rates for Verge based homesites and business links set up as your own island on a virtual Bluefall or among the planetoids around Redcrown.

A number of Gridpilots have worked their way into the actual AeGrid (including any heroes who care to try, using their own equipment). Some simply check out the advertising or use the new Comm Sector (which is fully operational and undergoing final stress testing), while others are either hackers looking for the thrill of infiltrating a new Grid or Grid cops scouting the terrain and watching for people doing ill before the final security protocols can be put in place. (See the sidebar on the AeGrid for more details.)

Water Activities

The heroes can rent aquascooters, gravskis, or skisails for the day (see the sidebar on Bluefall vehicles) without charge Renting a gravcruiser or gravyacht costs ¥20 per hour beyond normal resort fees.

One of the heroes' neighbor in the hotel is Alan Quinn (see Supporting Cast), a handsome man who has spent the last few days at the resort, and he's very interested in female companionship. Today, he's rented a gravcruiser and two gravskis and is looking for company (female heroes preferred but others welcome) for a day cruise around the islands. If any of the heroes do go out on the water in a gravyacht or something of comparable speed, see the adjustments in Scene Two.

Regardless of which activities the heroes choose, Gamemasters should keep a record of exactly what the heroes have with them, as once the action starts, they may not have the chance to go claim their usual gear

Diving for Doubloons

[illegible] monthly treasure dive, where guests are provided with diving training and sent down in the shallow waters within a kilometer of the beach to hunt for artifically crafted treasures and treasure chests. The value of [illegible] despite their lack of worth, sunken treasures are one of the reasons this event draws the most people

Within the last year, a smuggling operation began using this event as a way of easily moving contraband electronics, drugs, and other items easily embedded or hidden within these plastic chalices, doubloons, and treasure chests. Their contacts are [illegible] ous form, since the plastics cause enough blurring of [illegible]

Thall (Hnv/Lucullus/FA-9) has opened this channel for the Free Trade Guild with much success over the past year. He controls Polymartech CEO Dian Dodds (Xt/Regency/DTO-3) by threatening to reveal her well-hidden mutant status to her superiors at Acrim Industries. For her part, she hopes this small operation is as far as the collusion stretches.

Just When You Thought It Was Safe...

The morning and afternoon pass peacefully for the heroes, regardless of their chosen activities or locations. Depending on who's doing what and where they are, read the following boxed text. Those out on the water north and west of the island receive Box 1's details, while those still on shore get their news via Box 2. If anyone chose to accompany Alan Quinn on his cruiser, skip ahead to Scene 2.

If the Gamemaster wishes the heroes to be a little closer at hand for Scene 3 and the next act, have any heroes on the water make an Awareness–*perception* check. Any hero who achieves a Good success or better notices a skiff driving quite erratically a ways out beyond the resort marker buoys. It's as if the pilot has lost control of the boat and it speeds directly for one of the buoys!

Box 1. For heroes on the water

You're out on the water, enjoying the sun and the waves, when a sudden alarm klaxon blares out from the marker buoys set 3 kilometers off shore. As you scan around looking for the source of the alarm, you spot it—a high powered skiff heading straight for one of the buoys! Before you can react at all, it slams into the buoy and the buoy explodes, muffling its harsh klaxon with a larger explosion! The skiff plows through the debris, its nose shattered from the blast, and it too rocks with an explosion that rips away much of the skiff's nose.

After the double explosion, the boat stops almost immediately. From here, you can see no signs of people onboard.

Box 2: For heroes on dry land

You're involved in your activities but a passing resort security woman's comm unit blares loudly as she passes behind you. She apologizes for disturbing you and turns its volume down slightly as she takes it off her belt, but she and it are close enough for you to overhear:

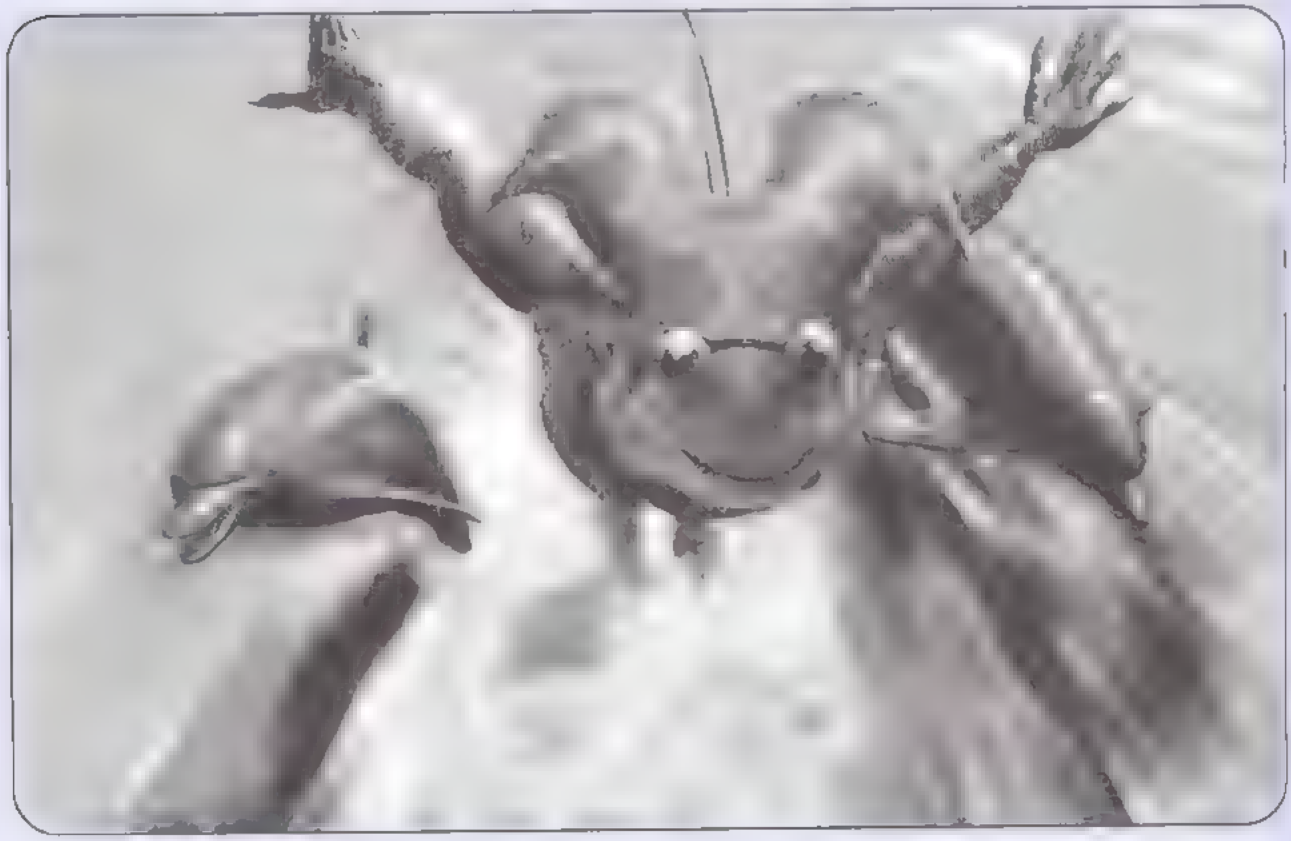
"Security personnel, pilot aquacraft out to Buoy A712 and investigate situation. Confirm explosion and/or destruction of said buoy and determine cause. Unconfirmed sightings by binocular towers report potential damage to unidentified skiff and passengers. Proceed with all haste."

Gamemaster's Note. Heroes can immediately volunteer to aid this security person, whose nametag identifies her as Angela. She's obviously nervous and excited by the alarm, and she's impatient to race down to the docks and grab one of the resort skiffs. The hero or heroes have one round in which to intimidate or impress Angela into accepting their help, though she'll only delay her run to a boat if a hero volunteers to grab medical supplies from his or her hut. Angela uses the Marginal Law Enforcer template. If they do not impress her with speech, they can choose to simply follow her to her boat, in which case she'll simply say, "If you're that insistent on helping, get in!"

If the heroes are military or police officials attached to any organized group, the hotel staff may request their assistance. They'll assign the hero(es) to the skiff heading out to investigate, and keep the other resort skiff back just in case of more trouble. A gravcruiser also stands ready as an ambulance if need be, though it waits until there are confirmed wounded before heading to the site.

Scene 2: No Time to Lose

This scene can play out differently depending on heroes' starting locations, company, and abilities to notice things quickly. Regardless of locations, this scene is going to happen quickly, as it only takes a skiff about five to ten minutes to load up, start, and get to the site from the shore, with similar timing from those already out on the water, depending on their locations. Gamemasters who wish to keep things simple can simply place those heroes out on the water (including



those with Alan) somewhere to match arriva. times at the crash site with those heroes who were on shore

A Cop's Never Off Duty!

Any heroes who chose to join Alan Quinn on his cruiser for the day have the chance to find out more about him. While he's far from shy he avoids discussing work while on vacation. That's not so unusual for those on vacation, really If pressed, Alan will eventually tell them he's a lieutenant in the REC normally stationed up on Nectaris, and he's on vacation just .ike the heroes are. If the heroes have given him any reason to look into who they are them, he checks into their backgrounds just to reassure himself that they pose no threat. This may be the result of their refusal to give up their weapons, one or more of them being allowed to keep them (indicating a possible law enforcement connection), or even just a sense that they are some sort of "professionals" (military special ops, intelligence agents, freelance troubleshooters, and so on). Any check will reveal only what the Regency and the Concord know about them. He doesn't act on the information unless it works into his cover—such as a hero who might be a "fellow REC agent," or if they are wanted criminals or pose some real danger.

Alan keeps a large duffelbag underneath the pilot's seat, from which he produced the appropriate number of aqualungs, seamasks, and fishing poles when needed. If anyone sneaks a peek in the bag (or waits until the end of this scene), they'll learn he carries a Condor 7 stutter pistol, a laser pistol, a holocamera, some repellent weave sweats in his size, one trauma pack I, and a Good-quality data slate.

Regardless of how much the heroes and Alan know about each other, they spend the morning diving and fishing, and they're having a late lunch on board the boat when the alarm klaxons sound. Read the following to the heroes involved.

> You're relaxing over lunch on the open deck of the gravcruiser and only now getting to the seafood lunch packed early by the resort staff. Suddenly, with everyone in the middle of laughing over Alan's latest bad joke, the blare of an alarm klaxon shatters the peace.
>
> As you scan around .ooking for the source of the alarm, Alan yells "It's a proximity alarm on one of the buoys marking the waters of the resort!" As he points, you spot a skiff as it slams into the proximity buoy, which promptly explodes and ends the siren! The skiff plows through the debris, and it too rocks with an explosion that rips away much of the skiff's nose! The boat seems to stop dead, and there are no signs of activity on board.
>
> Alan starts up the cruiser's engines, and turns to you. "I've got to go see if I can help anybody over there—do you know how to drive this cruiser and catch up to me? I'm going to take one of the gravskis over there before that skiff sinks or blows up. That buoy should not have exploded like that, and I'm going find out why!"

Unless none of his companions know how to pilot the cruiser Alan leaps to the back of the boat and onto one of the two gravskis mounted there. He kicks a launch button, freeing it from its mooring to drop away from the cruiser. Once away from the cruiser, he starts up the gravski and buzzes across the water toward the smoking ship. Heroes are welcome to do this as well, if they know how to operate a gravski. Alan d.d not grab a pistol before leaving, and unless the heroes were nosy or he's had a reason to show them what's in the bag, the pistols remain untouched

Agents of Last Resort

For those heroes accompanying Angela on the resort skiff, she'll be focused on driving as quickly as possible, though she must dodge a few swimmers and skisails .n her path. In her excitement, she forgets she should warn her passengers about sudden moves. Have everyone in this boat make Dexterity feat checks; if the result is a Failure, the hero falls to the deck of the boat in a sharp turn; if the check is a Critical Failure, the hero is thrown from the boat.

Once she's more than 200 meters from the beach, it's nearly a straight shot to the site, and she yells over the engine at the heroes: "Could someone please check and make sure we have supplies for this? They should be beneath the side seats!" and she points where everyone sits in the back of the boat. The bins hold six trauma packs, a medical gauntlet, and an all-terrain stretcher. In the other bin are two pairs of binoculars, two canisters of shark repellant, six life-vests, and stun batons with which to fend off any sea predators.

She's very intent on getting to the crash site first and taking charge, as Angela really wants to enter the REC, though her test scores kept her out the last two times she applied. Thus, she's putting more pressure on herself in this situation in order to merit another chance.

Adapting the Scene

Given the variety of possibilities for the heroes at the start of this adventure, Gamemasters may have to do some alterations to the scenes as written above to make sure the heroes all arrive for Scene 3 on time and together.

If all the heroes rented a boat on their own rather than accompany Alan or stay on shore, they'll be the ones closest to the explosion. Alan rented a skisail for the day. Once the buoy explodes, Alan will contact their boat (and the skiff approaching from the resort) over an open comm channel, offering assistance. He'll announce he's REC and request a pickup by whichever boat is closer to him, so he doesn't get left behind

The Quiet of the Sea

Once anyone gets within 200 meters of the wreck site, all communications gear falls under the influence of a Good-quality jamming device. Unless the heroes, Alan, or Angela are using communications gear constantly, this factor may not be discovered until well into Scene 3 or beyond. In either case, communications checks or modifications will have to reach Amazing efficiency to pierce the jamming signals and either receive or send any communications.

Surveying the Scene

This part of the scene assumes that the heroes are all arriving within moments of one another, though they don't actually reach the actual wreck until Scene 3. Once within 50 meters of the wrecked skiff, all players should make Awareness–*perception* checks for their heroes with a –1 step bonus for anyone who uses binoculars or other remote visual sensors. Angela sees nothing as she maneuvers through some of the wreckage. Alan and any other heroes on gravskis ride a bit lower in the water, and they make their checks at a +1 step penalty to spot the scene.

Ordinary Success
You spot a figure moving about on the deck of the smoldering ship. It appears to be looking around for something and moving some things around. Nothing else appears to be moving aside from a piece of glass dangling from the twisted metal edge of the former windshield. Before you get a better look at the figure, it moves quickly to the edge of the boat

Good Success
You spot a man moving about on the deck of the smoldering ship, but you're distracted by the severe amount of cybernetics around his face and torso. It appears to be looking around for something, but you see a rifle in his left hand. He's moving things around, looking for something specific. Before he finds it, the man looks directly at your boat, and backs away without looking, heading for the edge of the slowly sinking ship

Amazing Success
You spot a figure moving about on the deck of the smoldering ship—A heavily cybered man whose pale flesh looks like it hasn't been out of water in a long time. Metal covers the left third of his face, and a green glowing cyberoptic has replaced his eye. His arms and legs have irregular muscular outlines, revealing their altered nature. He carries some sort of laser rifle

He's moving about the boat, looking for something, and his eyes and the gun barrel move in perfect unison. His head jerks up as does the gun barrel when the sounds of the arriving boats gets louder, and he stares directly at the lead craft, then at each of the others, the gun following with each jerk of his head. He backs away, moving directly back to the edge of the boat.

Anyone who makes a successful Awareness check and has a ranged weapon capable of firing 50 meters or more can make one attack before the man disappears overboard. Psionics used against his mind are ineffective unless the Mindwalker uses *datalink* to attack the computer that operates this body

A successful Knowledge check with a +2 step penalty reminds heroes that the colors of the figure's swim trunks and the heavy amount of cybernetics point directly at the Nariac enclave on nearby Berilar. This knowledge could easily expand the adventure into a secondary investigation of the Nariac cybermariners, though this is discussed only in a sidebar at the end of the adventure

While heroes are welcome to pursue the cybermariner, their chances of catching him are slight, as will become quite apparent in the next scene. Heroes can approach the slowly sinking skiff in any water craft, though debris from the shattered hull and the buoy force all to slow to no more than 16 kph without risking damage to their own craft.

Scene 3: Adler's Pride No More

As you come closer to the ruined skiff, its nose and front third have dipped into the water. The contents at the back of the boat slide forward slowly, their weight forcing the boat lower into the water. The rear of the boat still rests above the water, but not for much longer. Alongside, multicolored DNA helixes spell out the blazon *Adler's Pride* against the navy blue hull.

Heroes with Ordinary or better success on a Knowledge check easily recognize the colors and symbols of the Thuldan Empire; anyone looking in the water would briefly see a pyramid, formerly an ornament on the ship's nose, drifting into the depths. If anyone within 20 meters of the skiff achieves a successful Awareness check, they can hear a low moan from someone lying on deck. Otherwise, there's no other chance of discovering any survivors without getting on board.

Rescue

Anyone can make the leap from one craft into the sinking *Adler's Pride*, though it takes a successful Dexterity check not

to slip and fall on the listing deck. Critical Failures result in the hero or character falling into the sea. As the heroes encounter the sinking skiff, it can remain afloat for another twelve rounds before it slips beneath the surface. With each additional person that climbs on board, that time frame drops by a round.

As the boat sinks, the pitch of the deck is still tolerable for the first six rounds of the rescue. However, every other round beyond that (rounds eight, ten, and twelve), anyone still within the skiff must make a Dexterity check at successive penalties to not slip down into the water at the nose. (Therefore, as the sharks attack, a hero in *Adler's Pride* must make a Dexterity check at +1 step penalty or slip down toward a shark attacking through the bow.)

On the boat, one body lies torn nearly in two beneath the port bow in the front, the other lying in a lump in the starboard back corner, his face and neck obliterated by shrapnel. There are three survivors on the boat, only one of whom is still conscious. He sits at the water's edge, right behind the pilot's wheel, wears the colors of a Thuldan soldier, but he has shards of glass embedded all along his left arm and side and his hand is nearly severed; he has lost much blood. He grunts in pain if the boat shifts at all, but he insists on being helped last. "Those two . . . more important . . . get them off first. Don't know how badly hurt . . . but doctor took blow . . . to head . . . daughter Ayla . . . caught explosion like me. . . " he grunts between bubbling breaths. "Get 'em . . . back home . . . fixed up . . . only place. . . . " he strains, and then mercifully passes out.

The other two lie across the port side of the boat from him, both face down. The older man's face and neck are massively bruised with blood trickling out his left ear and a massive lump and gash over his left eye, though his expensive suit shows no more lacerations or punctures. The young woman has numerous lacerations but her most serious wound is a large piece of shrapnel jutting out of her midsection. She is soaked in blood and getting incredibly pale.

All three of them are severely injured. Ayla has taken four mortals (one left), Artemus has taken three mortals (two left), and the soldier has taken one mortal (four left). All are below the half-line in wounds and stun as well. To prevent doing more damage to any of these patients, trauma packs should be administered before moving anyone. Once the patients are stable, it will then take two people three rounds to carefully pick up each patient and pass them into a waiting boat without aggravating wounds, unless the stretcher is used to float a patient up from the deck, reducing the time to two rounds per patient. Allow the heroes to choose how to approach helping these victims, but keep reminding them that the boat is sinking.

During this rescue, Alan will seek to hold the skiff steady and help out during the transfer of the wounded over to any of the other water craft, but he seems distracted. If the heroes get the matter in hand, he'll yell for someone to grab his holocamera out of his bag so he can record the evidence of the scene. Once he has the camera, he dives into the water, the camera's lamp lighting up some of the water now murky with wreckage and the blood of two men thrown from the skiff.

Angela works to cut through the comm unit interference and keep her skiff steady, unless she's needed to help move the wounded into the cruiser. Her skiff isn't large enough for more than one person lying prone on its rear deck, but as the *Adler's Pride* sinks, she has the idea of passing the wounded onto the front deck of her skiff to bring them closer to the cruiser's deck level.

Although the rescue is tense enough, things get worse. Seven rounds into the rescue, ask those not immediately busy with the rescue for Awareness–*perception* checks. Those who succeed notice the floating bodies disappear suddenly from where they bobbed slightly away from the skiff. One round later, the heroes can repeat the attempt. Anyone working on either *Adler's Pride* or the cruiser takes a +1 step penalty. Anyone actually in the water gains a –2 step bonus to this check.

Shark Attack

Anyone who succeeds at their Awareness–*perception* check sees an unwelcome but not unexpected form glide by in the water beneath them—sharks! Those whose achieved a Good success notice something odd about the sharks; any who got an Amazing result see that the sharks have circuitry lattices across their bodies! If no one manages to see the sharks above the water, Alan resurfaces, yelling, "Sharks! Look out!"

The round after they are noticed, the three cyblue sharks attack! They attack with some purpose.

If any of the Thuldan characters are visible from the water (i.e. to the sharks) such as on a stretcher between two boats, one shark fires at the characters with its aqualaser.

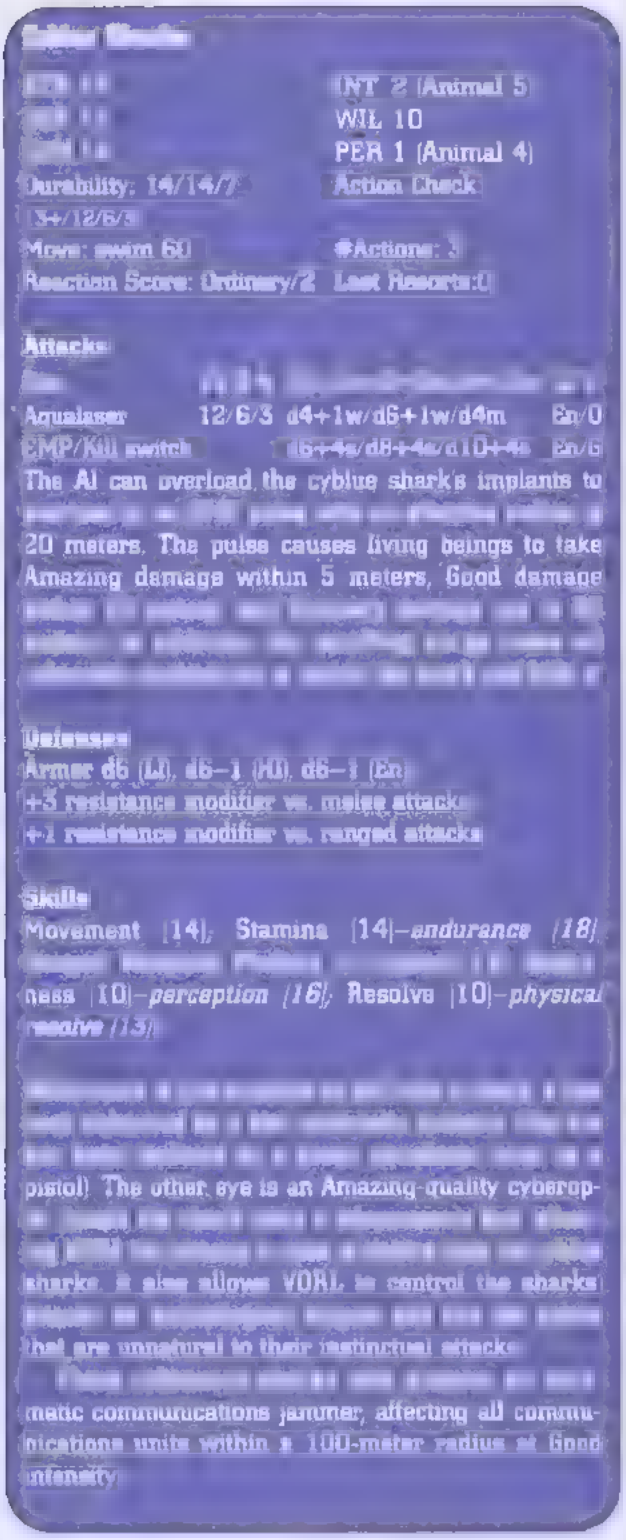
If anyone still swims in the water (such as Alan) without some form of shark repellant, at least one shark will attempt to bite a person in the water.

In the first round, one of the sharks enters the sinking boat through the hole in its nose, eagerly gobbling up the torn-in-twain Thuldan bleeding into the water. If anyone is still aboard *Adler's Pride* and slips toward it, the shark may instead attack that person (50% chance).

The sharks will harass and attack the group for d4 rounds and then mysteriously break off no more than two rounds after the *Adler's Pride* sinks. If they manage to kill even one of the sharks, the other sharks bite onto it and flee with the corpse into the depths so the heroes cannot claim it. If the heroes manage to nearly kill or capture a shark, the controlling AI uses its EMP overload to destroy any evidence that might reveal its existence.

Clues Among the Wreckage

If the heroes focus on keeping the wounded characters alive, then Alan Quinn is the primary collector of clues from this scene. If there are any spare moments and heroes are look-


INT 2 (Animal 5)
WIL 10
PER 1 (Animal 4)
Durability: 14/14/7
Action Check
3+/12/6/3
Move: swim 60
#Actions: 3
Reaction Score: Ordinary/2
Last Resorts:0
Attacks
Aqualaser 12/6/3 d4+1w/d6+1w/d4m En/0
EMP/Kill switch
The AI can overload the cyblue shark's implants to
20 meters. The pulse causes living beings to take
Amazing damage within 5 meters, Good damage
Defenses
Armor d6 (Li), d6–1 (Hi), d6–1 (En)
+3 resistance modifier vs. melee attacks
+1 resistance modifier vs. ranged attacks
Skills
Movement (14); Stamina (14)–endurance (18)
ness (10)–perception (16); Resolve (10)–physical
resolve (13)
pistol). The other eye is an Amazing-quality cyberop-
sharks. It also allows VOR1, to control the sharks
that are unnatural to their instinctual attacks.
matic communications jammer, affecting all commu-
nications units within a 100-meter radius at Good
intensity

ing around for answers, a successful Awareness–*perception* check reveals the following clues bobbing amid the wreckage or beneath the boats, if anyone dives in. All of these clues can be revealed later, assuming Alan had the chance to use his holocamera and he did not lose it in the fray. Given the hectic pace established in Acts II and III, this reflection over some of the clues may not come until after the Epilogue to spur new adventures from it. A Gamemaster might make this information available to heroes only through the successful completion of complex skill checks involving any relevant skills listed below. If others are investigating the information, the Gamemaster should decide an appropriate time that the heroes (possibly through Alan) gain access to the information

- The proximity buoy should not have exploded; some form of explosive was attached to it. This will be available after an examination of the buoy by qualified police officials–or heroes. (Ordinary complex skill check: Demolitions–*set explosives* or Investigate–*search* [+1], 1 minute per check.)
- There were a number of laser holes in the front end of the *Adler's Hope*. This information will also be available after thorough examination of the scene. (Simple Investigate–*search* or Awareness–*perception* [+1] check.)
- There was also some form of electronic device still partly attached to the hull of the skiff. This clue will also be available after thorough examination of the scene. (Simple Investigate–*search* check to find. Good complex skill check: System Operation–*comms* or Technical Science–*technical knowledge* [+1] to figure out; 3 minutes per check.)
- All of the extraneous components and mechanisms found amid the wreckage had components commonly used among the Nariac and Austrin-Ontis nations. This detail will take time to trace, although it's not especially difficult to confirm. (Good complex skill check: Investigate–*track* or Knowledge–*computer operation* [+2]; one hour per check.)
- Nariacs rarely apply cybernetics to animals due to the high rate of cykosis. This information is available to heroes as the result of a simple Knowledge skill check at a +2 step penalty. A hero with any special knowledge of cyber systems can attempt to use the relevant skill to attempt the check.
- The aqualasers present in both the sharks (and the aquatic man's rifle) are far too small for the usual industrial use. Tracing the lasers takes time, and this clue is the strongest lead to future adventures. See the Epilogue. This information will not likely be available to the heroes until the end of the adventure unless they use some fairly knowledgeable contact or even another AI who tracks the info down while the heroes are involved in other things. (Amazing complex skill check: Investigate *track* [+2], Knowledge–*computer operation* [+4], or Computer Science–*hacking* [+2], four hours per check.)

Alan (and any other hero involved in collecting clues) theorizes that the aquatic man placed the devices on the undersides of the skiff and the buoy. One device overrode the skiff's controls, and the cybernetic man crashed it into the exploding buoy. What clues are missing are why someone or something went to so much trouble to kill seven people.

Tending to the Wounded

Now that the wounded have been transferred to the yacht, the issue of further medical care is imminent. Angela tells them there are infirmary facilities at the Yliam resort, but the closest

public hospital that could treat the older man's head trauma is 300 kilometers south on the island of Sharolk's Claw. Even with immediate contact and air transport, there's a high chance that at least one of them will die before reaching that southern island.

If the lacerated crewman is conscious, he overhears this conversation between Angela on her skiff and any heroes on the yacht. (Neither the older man nor the young woman will regain consciousness until they receive hospital treatment.) The crewman will say that there is a hospital facility nearby on the nearby private island of Islvych 5 km NNW of Parr-Yllam. If heroes interview him, he can provide additional information, depending on the degree of success the hero achieves on the Interaction–*interview* skill check. Because he is slipping in and out of consciousness, add a +1 step penalty to the attempt.

(Ordinary) Anyone attempting to get past the security buoys around Islvych needs security codes to do so. Anyone slipping past them activates an alarm and may come under fire from the buoys or from coastal gun batteries.

Gamemaster's Note: Assume the buoys have a System Operation–*sensors* rating of 14/7/3, and that three of them are within range of nearly any entry point. This means any intruder must overcome the sensors on three buoys or be very lucky indeed.

(Ordinary) The other two survivors are Doctor Artemus Vych, a baronet of the Thuldan Empire, and his daughter Ayla Vych Taron.

(Good) Today's security code is 083651, transmitted over the ship's comm unit to Comm Central on Islvych upon contact.

(Good) The crewman's name is Stewart Granger, though his friends call him "Buzz."

(Amazing) Ayla's husband Michael Taron died when the buoy exploded, throwing his broken body overboard.

(Amazing) Buzz heard a voice, very harsh and almost machine-like, say "You know of me. You must be silenced. I will remain hidden."

(Amazing) Michael had a talent for tapping into computers psionically.

(Amazing) When the attack occurred, Michael was discussing VoidCorp with the doctor and some well-hidden AI he had discovered accidentally.

(Amazing) Michael's work involved experiments in natural human biotech development–mutants similar to the mechalus but human.

Changing of the Guard

As the heroes and characters plan the best way to get the wounded to safety, another skiff speeds toward them from the east. Their comm units crackle and come back to life as a transmission comes in over them.

The voice comes through strong and loud, and he talks quickly, not allowing any interruption of his message.

"This is Agent Donald Gettys, RIA Ministry of Intelligence. As you appear to be, I was here on vacation but heard the commotion and decided to help. If anyone's wounded, I suggest we move him quickly to the island to the north–I've heard it has the closest thing to a hospital within 200 kilometers. I'll escort you and try and clear things with their security as we approach."

The skiff zooms to you quickly and pulls up alongside. Inside the skiff is a tall, lanky man in an open shirt and swimming trunks. He shows you his identification badge to confirm his identity.Alan Quinn looks a bit annoyed by this, but he produces his own REC badge and shows it to Gettys, who smiles and nods.

After basic identification has been established, Gettys looks over at the resort skiff and locks eyes with Angela. "You've been a great help, kid, but you should get back to shore. We'll take care of it from here." As the heroes are getting the wounded settled in on their skiff, Gettys will begin talking to one of you to find out what happened.

While he's talking, you see Alan look to the earnest and offended Angela. He bends down to her skiff and shakes her hand. "You do good work, Angela. You ever want to work on my team, give me a call. I'll be sure to notify your bosses at Yllam about what you did out here."

Angela beams and thanks Alan profusely. She likewise thanks you for your help and offers you a ride back to the resort now that the authorities are dealing with the problem.

If the heroes offer assistance in getting the wounded to the hospital, Alan will welcome the help. Agent Gettys will be less interested in any further help, but will acquiesce when Alan points out to him that there is still the matter of actually getting the wounded to this private hospital.

Donald Gettys comes off as cagey at best, though any checks on his name, badge number, or skiff registration all check out as exactly what he says. Of course, anyone doing said checks over the AeGrid or usual comm lines attracts the attention of the Ministry of Security, causing their own records to come under scrutiny. Heroes using Good or Amazing Grid shadow software can avoid this.

Act II: Crossfire

This act kicks the adventure into high gear as our heroes land on Islvych, the private island of their rescued charge. As guests of Doctor Vych, the heroes can learn much about how the Thuldans live. This act places the heroes firmly between a rock and a hard place as they get embroiled in someone else's private war.

Islvych

The private island home and workplace of Doctor Artemus Vych is the stage for Acts II and III of this adventure. This small island is currently undergoing basic terraforming, as is the Thuldan way. A white sand beach and strains of Earth-style grass have been imported and adapted to the island.

This section corresponds to the Map Key on all the locations on the island, freeing the structure of the adventure to focus on the action at hand, not the background, and it only refers back to this key for general details on the rooms. Note that the overall map of Islvych rests on a grid where each square measures 500 meters per side. Here are the island's major sites and brief notes on each of them, as well as more details on Vych Manor and the Outpost Nereid.

1. **Vych Manor** This is the home of Artemus Vych and the primary landmark on the island. The top point of this partly pyramidal building contains a bright glass beacon that projects a strong light at night, which provides a navigational mark for ships.

When a defense alarm goes up, armored doors close over the two external ground entrances to the manor. These doors resist penetration like a zero-g body tank, while the rest of the building's external walls only resist d8 damage of each kind (though they take 2d4 rounds to penetrate). The windows of the solarium only resist damage like a CF softsuit, though they resist d6+2 Energy damage when polarized to reflect light.

2. **Guest Cottages**: These cottages are each 25 meters square and provide adequate facilities and temporary living space for four individuals or couples in each cottage. All have audio/visual comm arrays in the common room of each, and these can be used to reach any specific comm units within 3000 km. Basic Gridcasters are also on hand for long distance communications across Bluefall or the Aegis system via the AeGrid. The interior kitchens are empty of food, though if guests are expected, food is prepared at the Manor and delivered to the cottages.

3. **Guard Barracks**. Aside from a far darker metal for their exterior and their size of 30 meters, these barracks appear no different from the guest cottages. The 16 regular guards on the security force live here, while the commander lives in the manor. Each guard has a footlocker with the following armaments. mass pistol, stutter pistol, laser rifle, appropriate ammunition for three reloads, and four stun grenades each.

4. **The Beach**: The beach is unremarkable save for the white sand contrasting with the predominantly black rock along the coast.

5. **Breakwater & Pier**: This covered and fortified pier acts as the breakwater to prevent the beach from washing away. It also provides a covered docking area for more than 25 boats, though there are never more than six vehicles docked here at any time. Currently docked are two Comar S-3 skiffs, a Comar Y-9 gravyacht, and two gravskis.

Inside the pier are two mounted Bantam 5 missile launchers, their ammunition caches hidden within the roof. They are hidden from view: A section of the roof slides back and the missile launcher extends above it. Although it is normally fired through remote control (from the manor or guardhouse), it can be fired manually from the boathouse. This is the first line of defense against intruders; anyone without authorization who approaches within 1500 meters of the breakwater will come under fire. These are only manned when the alarm has sounded. This defense is a recent addition to the boathouse; Garond put it in to back up his security crews. It has not yet been used.

6. Hangar/Garage: This 50 square-meter hangar provides more effective cover for anything undergoing repair. A winch draws craft up from the pier through its southern wall. Inside the hangar are four electric cars (with bays for two more), four skycars (two sedans, two 2-seaters), and an STG shuttle; a Rehjib skisail sits in the repair bay. The repair bay also holds parts and supplies to repair and maintain all these vehicles.

7 Landing Pad: This provides a landing and staging area for any arriving or departing sky craft, usually skycars from Filtrane or elsewhere

8. Vychlabs Private Laboratory: While Doctor Vych's true laboratory resides elsewhere, standard Thuldan bioresearch is done here in the open, in case there are ever inspectors investigating the mutagenic research of the high-profile doctor. This gives them a public face to Thuldan research, while the real work remains hidden.

This two-story laboratory is equipped with full medical research facilities and has a staff of twenty-five. None of the workers here know about Outpost Nereid.

9. Construction Site: This partially constructed dwelling appears to be a true three-story pyramid house with two levels of basements carved into the black rock of the island. It is a wedding gift to Ayla Vych and her husband, and 1700 construction drone robots work away tirelessly all around the site.

Vych Manor

Vych Manor is an imposing structure of angles, glass, and cerametal. Aside from the entry doors and the tall windows at the southern exposure and at the top, this tall building seems cast of seamless metal that shines without blinding eyes with a reflective glare.

Gamemasters can assume certain standards all about the manor. All ceilings are 12 feet high, though most internal doors only rise to 9 feet and slide into or out of adjoining walls. All rooms are equipped with the best equipment money can buy. Unless any deviations are noted in the details, heroes or characters should be able to find appropriate common items where one would normally look (datastates and 3D chips in the library, knives and food in the kitchen, etc.). All areas marked "WC" on the map are bathrooms, which contain at least a toilet and sink; most also hold a shower stall. Closets, storage units, and furniture are not marked on the map, though they exist within living quarters and many rooms.

The interior doors have simple touchpad mechanisms that open them; most are unlocked. Only a few (noted in the individual room description) remain locked at all times. The elevator tube that intersects the entire house transports up to six people at a time up to Level Two by pushing the 2 button on a standard number pad (with numerals 0–9 on it). Only Doctor Vych, his family members, or Garond can send the elevator up to any other levels by preset 4-digit codes. To get the elevator to descend to Outpost Nereid, Garond and Vych alone know the key code sequence (7713). The elevator moves at 2 meters per second going up or down, and it is sealed from entry while the car is in operation.

1. The Entry: Entrance doors are 12 feet high and actually swing open, unlike other doors in the manor. The doors are reinforced cerametal and can take 4 mortal wounds of structural damage before buckling (external walls take 6)

2: Library & Common Study: In addition to the usual datastates, comps, and Gridcasters on tables and nearby racks of 3D data chips, this library actually has old style printed books—one of Doctor Vych's prides. The collection spans medical texts and novels from 19th through 21st century Earth as well as some more recent nostalgic works.

3 Kitchen

3A. Pantry/Supplies: There are enough food and supplies here, excepting fresh fruit and meats, to survive for three months without restocking

3B Servants' Entrance

4 Servants' Quarters: There is a single bathroom hidden beneath the stairs on the map for the servants' use that is reachable by a small internal hallway among the quarters.

5 Dining Room

6. Recreation Room: This room has a holoprojection area, a billiard table, and other recreations. All of these things and the wall dividing this from the dining room can recede into the floor to combine the rooms into a ballroom.

7 Sitting Room/Parlor

Second Floor—Hospital: This floor has become converted into a hospital to care for Doctor Vych's comatose wife and any others injured in his employ. There is a doctor a head nurse, and two junior nurses in residence, with at least one of the latter on duty at all times. This small area is as well equipped as any hospital for supplies and biomedical equipment, though they only have beds for four patients at a time.

The personal quarters of the hospital staff are locked with keypads, though Doctor Vych and his security chief have the override codes. The staff doctor, a neurosurgeon, uses the Amazing-quality Doctor template, while the nurses all operate as Ordinary-quality Doctor templates.

8. **Head Nurse's Quarters**
9. **Doctor's Quarters**
10. **Doctor's Office** The medical records and details of

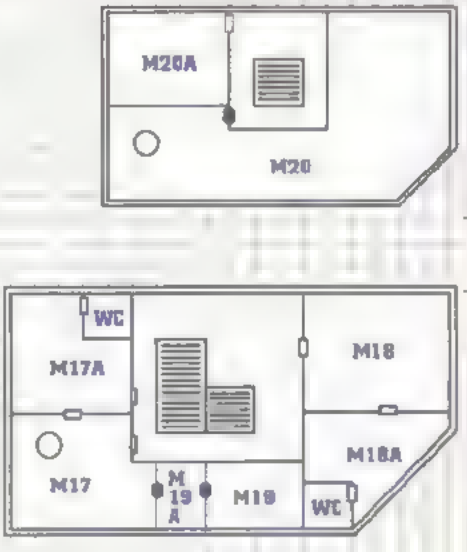
M04A–Islvych

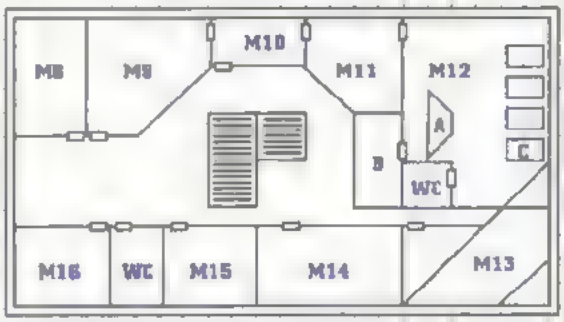
1 Wych Manor
6 Harbour Garage
8 Private Laboratories
Seaplane & Covered Pier Docking Area

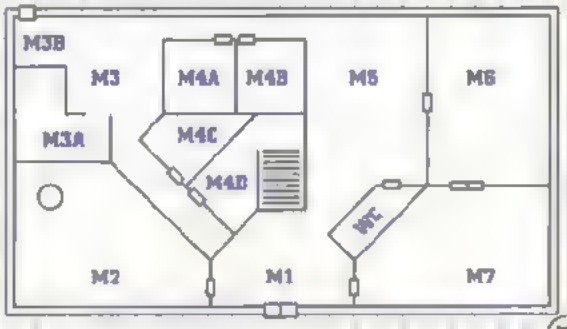
M04B–Vych Manor & Outpost Nereid

Stairs
Secret Door
Door
WC Bathroom

One square equals one meter







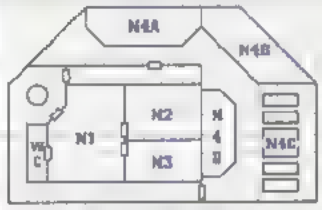
Islvych Manor

M1 Entry
M2 Library / Common Study
M3 Kitchen
M3A Servants' Entrance
M4 Servants' Quarters (A-D)
M5 Dining Room
M6 Recreation Room
M7 Sitting Room / Parlor
M8 Head Nurse's Quarters
M9 Doctors' Quarters
M10 Master's Office
M11 Medical Lab
M12 Infirmary / Hospital
M12A Nurses' Station
M12B Medical Supplies
M12C Male WC / Shower
M13 Solarium
M14 Servants' Lounge
M15 Nurse's Quarters
M16 Nurse's Quarters
M17 Doctor Vych's Quarters / Master Suite
M17A Doctor Vych's Bedroom
M18 Anya's Former Quarters / Suite
M18A Anya's Former Bedroom
M19 Chief Garond's Quarters
M19A Armory & Emergency Access
M20 Doctor Vych's Private Laboratory
M20A Beacon Mechanisms & Controls

Nereid Outpost

Stairs Door WC Bathroom Elevator

N1 Command Post
N2 Technician's Quarters
N3 Technician's Quarters
N4 Project Nereid Laboratory
N4A Gene Pool Dauphalene Specimen Tank
N4B Central Computer
N4C Gillfolk Gestation Tubes
N4D Ministry Communications
N5 Guard Post
N6 Security Military Personnel Quarters
N7 Security Military Personnel Quarters
N8 Storage
N9 Air Pump & Air Filter Mechanisms
N10 Airlock Alpha
N11 Airlock Beta
N12 Airlock Gamma
N13 Power Generators
N14 Airlock Delta
N15 Cavern Dock and Tool Storage
N16 Sea Access Pool



Outpost Upper Level

Outpost Lower Level

Vych Manor and Outpost Nereid

any treatments more than a month old exist only in this office and its computer. This is more of a reception and conference room with a desk, chairs, and a couch.

11. Medical Laboratory: Any special treatments or pharmaceuticals that need to be processed can be made here in this lab, as well as the usual tests and checks needed for any patients within the hospital.

12. Infirmary/Hospital

12A. Nurse's Station: There is always one nurse on call seated at the nurse's station. The station contains at least one of each type of medical scanner and trauma pack as well as a full communications array with the entire island and a Gridcaster to reach other medical professionals or info while on duty.

12B. Supplies

12C. Mrs. Vych: The frail 75-year-old Thea Vych lies here in a coma of unknown cause, her body tended by machines. The doctors cannot find any physical reason for her coma, but this entire hospital exists to care for her.

13. Solarium: The glass window bridges the front southern corner of the house, allowing in all the sunlight possible, though there is a dimmer plate on a wall, allowing the glass to be polarized to reflect some or all the light. The ceiling at this corner stretches up 35 feet, allowing light through the solarium and over the interior walls into the hospital and servants' lounge. There are many medicinal Earth plants growing here, which the Ishvych researchers use in their work.

14. Servants' Lounge: The hospital staff and servants share this room with its holoprojectors, small library, and two Gridcasters for their use.

15 & 16. Nurse's Quarters

Third Floor—Family Living Areas

17. Master Suite of Doctor Vych—Sitting Room

17A. Bedroom & Full Bathroom (with tub & jacuzzi)

18. Former Suite of Ayla Vych

18A. Bedroom & Full Bathroom (with tub & jacuzzi)

19. Quarters of Security Chief Jerry Garond: These spartan quarters hold only a bed, a small Gridcaster and datachips on a table, and some small clothing storage. The walls are dominated by Jerry's weapons collection. At least one of any hand-to-hand weapon more than 100 years old (PL0 through PL6) are mounted on these walls.

19A. Armory: This secret room is immediately accessible only to Jerry or Doctor Vych by pressing their palmprints to the mirror over the dresser (identical on either side). The dresser and mirror slide open to reveal a small armory. On the racks are two each of all PL6 ranged weapons (see the *Player's Handbook*, Table P39) and the following other weapons: all types of grenades (3 each) and two grenade launchers, laser/mass/sabot/stutter pistols (2 each) and quantum/render rifles (2 each). During major attacks, Garond's guards may be given some of these armaments, though the paranoid doctor prefers they remain only in hands of those he implicitly trusts. Garond can reach the master suite through this hidden room if the doctor is in trouble.

Top Floor—Vych's Private Study

20. Doctor Vych's Private Lab & Study: This room can only be reached by the elevator or through the secret door at the top of the stairs. Doctor Vych's private journals are kept here, in archaic paper books handwritten in ink. Many unrevealed details of Thuldan genetic research are in these journals, including his work on the gillfolk and his analyses of the deepfallen corpse, as are the doctor's personal views and knowledge of friends and enemies alike. These journals could cause political and scientific ripples all the way back to the Stellar Ring if publicly revealed.

20A. Beacon Mechanism. This room holds the machinery for the beacon atop the Vych Manor as well as the communications relays and antennae for the island.

Outpost Nereid

This hidden cellar complex can only be reached by submarine (approaching at depths of more than 500 meters to avoid detection by security buoys) or by the private elevator from Vych Manor.

1. Command Post: All military communications arrays and security monitors are in the northern half of this room. Also here are redundant controls for the airlocks in Sublevel 2. The southern half provides a small lounge and kitchen/dining area for the staff.

2 & 3. Technician's Quarters: Personal gridsuits are the only benefit over standard servants' quarters here.

4. Nereid Laboratory: This chamber is where Doctor Artemus Vych created the Thuldan gillfolk from the dead tissues of a deepfallen.

4A. Gene Pool/Deepfallen Specimen Tank: This vat is icy cold to the touch. Suspended in a gelatinous preservative is the partially dismembered corpse of a deepfallen male. It is missing one arm and part of its right leg, and there is a ragged hole in its chest (the wound that killed it). Its face is mutilated, with one eye removed and the skull laid open around it.

4B. Central Computer

4C. Gillfolk Gestation Tubes: This part of the lab is dominated by the smell of sea water and the bubbling of gestation tanks as they create Thuldan gillfolk in two-meter long tanks six at a time, all constantly monitored by computers and holocameras.

4D. Ministry Communications: This separate comm array provides direct links to the Ministry of Mutations and Specialized Adaptations on Filtrane. Mandatory reports every four hours keep them strictly informed of the work here.

5. Guard Post: A small station here provides security monitors for all rooms on the lower level of the outpost. One guard controls the airlocks from here, though they can be controlled at the Command Post.

6 & 7. Guards' Quarters: Spartan double bunks and two storage lockers are the norm for the military quarters. Storage bins beneath the bunks hold weapons: 2 stutter pistols & rifles, 2 mass pistols & rifles in each.

8. Storage: Food and various supplies in this room.

9. Air Pump & Air Filter Mechanisms

10. Airlock Alpha: Like all the airlocks here, only one of these flanking doors can be open at any one time, the other automatically locks airtight. There are levers on the walls that initiate air pumps and drains, emptying a room of water and bringing in air (or vice-versa) before opening the opposite door. All airlocks can also be flooded with gases from the Command Post or the Guard Post (Good-quality knockout gases) when the soldiers deem it necessary (to prevent intrusion).

11. Airlock Beta

12. Airlock Gamma

13. Power Generators: These generators power Outpost Nereid and can recharge mini-subs and other equipment docked here. This separate power prevents any tracing of energy usage to revealing the existence of the outpost.

14. Airlock Delta: The airlocks on this stairwell exist in case the air pump fails and the cavern pool floods up beyond the cavern deck.

15. Cavern Deck & Tool Storage: This suspended deck overlooks the sea access pool, and holds tools and components for submarine or airlock repairs. It also provides a rung ladder off the platform and down to the sea pool. Lastly, there is an air pump that keeps the air in the outpost fresh.

16. Sea Access Pool: This pool is roughly 40 meters deep from the surface, though the ceiling looms another 50 meters above that. The 20 meter-diameter access tunnel to the open sea is only 60 meters long and the 100 meter diameter of the chamber allows some Thuldan mini-subs the room to dock and either disembark through the nose airlock or surface and exit through the top and along the deck. They can also turn themselves around and exit nose first from Outpost Nereid.

After the end of Act II, there is a mini-sub docked here that allowed the entry of the Thuldan cleanup crew into the outpost. If heroes and Doctor Vych make their escape through Nereid, they'll be able to use this vehicle to escape.

Vehicle	Drv	Acc	Cruis	Max
Mini Sub	+2	10	20	40

Type	Dur	Avail	Cost
G	15/15/7	Restricted	350K

Attack

Mass rifles (2)	3/9/20	d6w/d8+1w/d6+1m	En/G

Defenses

Hull charge	Contact/Personal	d10+2s/d6+2w/d8+2w

The Thuldan mini-sub has a top hatch, a rear cargo or personnel compartment with room enough for 12 people (or three stretchers and 6 people), a rear gunner's chair, a forward gunner's chair set beneath the floor and the pilot's chair, which rests to the starboard side of the sub. The nose of the sub also opens up as a hatch when docked at facilities like this, acting as an airlock for moving large articles (as opposed to strictly personnel through the top hatch).

The sub has a pair of front and rear mounted mass rifles. It carries no armor due to weight requirements, though it can resist pressures down to 400 meters below sea level. Its last-ditch defense is a charging of the hull, which often kills anything in contact with the hull. However, this hull charge drastically drains the energy batteries, slows the craft's movement by 50 percent, and overloads the rifles until external repairs can be made.

Scene 1: Taking Care

Once the heroes get the gravcruiser and attendant skiff under way again, it only takes a few minutes before they spot brightly polished buoys in the water ahead of them and a small island 2 km beyond them. Once within 300 meters of the buoys, you are contacted by a computerized communiqué stating this message: "You have entered a restricted area. Please alter your course or transmit the proper authorization codes immediately. Any attempts to deviate from these instructions may be met with defensive countermeasures."

If the heroes have the security code, they can approach the island easily, the computer responding to the code with a "Welcome home, sir. Your party is cleared for docking." If they don't present the code, a few warning shots come from the island d4 rounds after they pass the security buoys (see the description of the pier in the Islvych map and accompanying text). The guards don't shoot to hit the boats, only to scare them off. They guide any invaders into the docks and cover behind the breakwater, keeping their mounted guns on the boats. Along the dock are six men armed with stutter pistols.

If anyone announces their affiliation with any official agency (RIA, REC, CIB, etc.), Security Chief Garond will let them approach but he'll still have armed guards keeping watch over them until IDs are confirmed and he knows why they have come to this private property.

If the heroes or anyone sends a verbal communication about the wounded passengers they bring to the island, "the Chief" cancels all attacks but wants confirmation by asking for descriptions of the people they've brought. Once he knows it is Doctor Vych and Ayla, he contacts the medical doctor and sends a skycar up to the Manor to bring him down to the dock for possible triage. If the heroes let Garond know the patients are stable, the doctor remains in the hospital and preps for surgery.

Once the heroes, Alan, and Donald dock at the pier, six security guards with stutter pistols in their belts climb onto the cruiser's foredeck and bring over enough all-terrain stretchers for the number of wounded the heroes previously told to Garond. All will be quickly moved off the boat, up the pier, and into two waiting skycars, each of which can hold two stretchers. If any heroes have wounds that need treating, they are placed on stretchers as well, though there may be a slight delay as more stretchers and skycars are brought from the hangar.

Any unwounded personnel are held back by Jerry Garond and four security guards at the pier for questioning. If anyone asks to help with the wounded or mentions medical training, Garond contacts the doctor, who speaks with the hero(es) over an open comm unit.

The doctor, who only gives his name as Graves, will only accept help from trained personnel who are of Thuldan nationality. (This is arrogant, but it's true that Thuldan medical science is considered among the best in the Stellar Ring.) Otherwise, he coldly thanks the people responsible for keeping them alive but refuses their aid and refers them to the Chief.

Feeling Secure?

Chief Garond and his security team escort any uninjured heroes and characters along the edge of the beach toward the guest cottages (Area 2 on the Islvych map). This becomes an encounter scene that can either make this adventure easier or more complicated, depending on its outcome.

Garond is agitated about the attack on the doctor and is angry that he wasn't there to prevent it. As a result, his starting attitude is hostile to the heroes simply because they're the only possible targets of his aggression, rather than Michael Taron (who he's secretly glad did not survive the attack). Garond's men, on the other hand, are neutral to the heroes and Alan unless they make clear any disdain they have for Thuldans.

Alan and Garond seem to get along well enough, but Agent Gettys doesn't help himself any by constantly mentioning that the Regency has to be kept well informed of this to prevent any diplomatic complications. In the time it takes to reach the guest cottages, he mentions several times that he'll need a gridcaster so he can contact his superiors. Garond and his security team become increasingly annoyed with him.

Garond takes each of the heroes aside one at a time during the walk to get everyone's version of the events out at the boat. Garond asks a few basic questions of everyone:

What did you see?

What caused the crash?

Was there anyone else on the boat? What happened to them? (Garond refers to the other four people who were on the *Adler's Pride*, but he may learn more . . . .)

(For heroes linked to other official groups): Are you here in an attempt to circumvent normal Thuldan protocols? What were you doing so close to this island, which Ambassador Stott considers Thuldan national soil?

Honest and forthright answers or shows of sincere concern for the wounded improve Garond's reaction to a hero. If he gets the sense that a hero lies to him or bothers him for more information than he wants to give, add a +1 step penalty on any of the hero's future Interaction checks with Garond or the guards. This scene may be crucial in establishing some character interactions that affect later game play.

Once they all reach the guest cabins, Garond suggests the heroes relax and wait in the cabins until he has something to tell them. A storm out at sea obscures the afternoon sun, and prevents anyone from leaving the island for the next few hours, though it only stirs up a lot of wind on Islvych. Although the guards keep an eye on the heroes, they're not intrusive about it. In the cabins, the heroes will find complete facilities, including washers and dryers in case they want to clean their clothes after handling the wounded. There is even some light casual clothing that should fit most heroes, in case they wish to change into something other than what they were wearing at the resort. In addition, there are gridcasters or similar devices in each of the cabins. Through these, the heroes can get in touch with anyone they want in Aegis. While the heroes wait here for the wounded to be tended to, Agent Gettys will contact his "superiors:" VORL, who has access to the entire network of the island (except Outpost Nereid), will download Getty's report into its massive storage banks. VORL also leaves several backdoor connections to the island's internal Grid. To get to the data at Outpost Nereid, VORL dispatches its cybermariner, Les Dybrol, to establish a link. (Les will show up in Act III.) Finally, VORL will immediately alert Thuldan forces on Filtrane Island that there was an extensive security breach at Islvych, putting into action their contingency plan to destroy all evidence of the research being conducted there (see Scene 2).

Scene 2: Traitors to the Thuldan Empire

It is dusk. Several things happen simultaneously in this scene. First, Donald Gettys slips away from the group and makes for his boat. Second, Artemus Vych wants to speak to Garond and the people who rescued him. Third, a Thuldan strike force shows up. The Gamemaster should have an idea where each of the heroes are at any given time.

First, the Good News

Anyone near Chief Garond hears his comm unit beep an incoming message. He opens the channel, and he and anyone within 10 meters hears Doctor Graves on the other end, informing Garond that Vych is awake and wants to speak to him and those who rescued him and his daughter. Graves goes on to say that he is going to give Vych a sedative in a few minutes, so he doesn't have much time. He'll send transportation to meet them on their way over.

Then, the Bad News

Agent Gettys takes this opportunity to slip away from the group. He is 25 meters away and just about out of sight when Garond spots him and sends two of his guards after him. They fire stutter pistol shots at him, but he manages to avoid getting hit. He runs headlong for the beach.

At least two security guards chase after Gettys, and heroes can see that Garond really wants to go after the annoying RIA agent. The heroes can start to give chase, but Garond reminds them they have to get to the manor to speak quickly with Doctor Vych (and any of their comrades up at the hospital).

And More Bad News

As Garond and the heroes are heading toward the manor, have them make Awareness–*perception* checks. Only an Amazing success allows the hero to hear the whine of two approaching grav vehicles; one is the skycar coming from the manor. The other is unidentified. A second successful Awareness–*perception* check success allows the hero to spot an incoming skytank flying low as if to avoid detection. If the hero informs Garond of this, he will immediately put the island's security forces on alert and order the manor locked down.

Shortly thereafter, a skycar pulls up to the group, providing a fast ride for five up to the manor. If there are more than five heroes and characters, Garond and any security guards simply step onto the side wings and grab onto handholds, riding outside. The skycar rises to about a meter above the ground and heads toward the manor. While in the skycar, heroes may roll another Awareness–*perception* check; a success indicates that the hero spots three approaching water craft—small intrusion vehicles of the type used by commandos—within the perimeter of the warning buoys.

Regardless of whether the heroes approach the manor or are on the beach, the skytank's loudspeakers project a message (repeating over any open comm units): "Attention on the island. You are in violation of Thuldan Imperial codes. You are guilty of harboring criminals against his Imperial Majesty's peace, infiltrating and illegally stealing Thuldan electronic property and data, and endangering loyal Thuldan Imperial citizens. You are under arrest. Any resistance will be met with lethal force."

The Thuldan Mission The nature of the research going on at the Vych installation is very sensitive, so much so that if the security there is breached, the Thuldans send one of their commando units there to destroy any evidence of it, including anyone associated with it. The warlions are not here to arrest anyone; rather, they are here to implement this contingency operation.

Thuldan Tactics: The Thuldans are well aware of the principal targets at the site, but the combat team has had only a short while to review its defenses. They do not know about the missile launcher in the boathouse.

The skytank is the linchpin of the operation: It is responsible for fire support and command-and-control of the ground troops. Its sensors are able to pick out ground targets and direct the warlions to those locations. Unfortunately for the Thuldans, it is taken out of the fight two rounds into the combat by a pair of missiles from the launchers at the boathouse. One of the security force managed to get to them unnoticed and fired them at the most dangerous target he could find. Return fire from the Thuldan team at the beachhead rips the boathouse apart; no further missiles come from the boathouse.

After it is hit, the skytank will withdraw, landing out of reach of the island's defenses; its crew assesses the damage and effects what repairs it can, but it is out of the fight.

Without the skytank, the ground teams' mission becomes more difficult, but not impossible. The team securing the beach takes cover; it also works as a reserve, ready to move inland at a moment's notice. The other two, one heading out to the left and the other to the right, make for the principal target: the manor. The team on the right also acts as security against attack by any guard troops from the barracks. The secondary targets is the lab building.

Each individual maneuver team has six soldiers, one of whom is a sergeant (the team on the left is commanded by the unit's officer, a Captain).

The warlions all correspond to the Good Soldier template with the following mutation adjustments: 13 Strength, innate Night Vision, and Redundant Vital Organs. They are each armed with an autoflechette SMG and mass pistol, four reloads for each, a combat knife, three fragmentation grenades, and two satchel charges. For defense, all wear carametal mail (d4+2[LI]/d6[HI]/d6[En]–see the *Arms & Equipment Guide* for details).

Reactions

Heroes and supporting cast characters have a few options, all of which they can combine, if they wish.

Make a Run for It: By far the safest solution, the heroes can make quickly for the manor house. This will be Chief Garond's plan—he will order all of his security forces to do this. The group can get to the manor either on foot or in the skycar. Of the two, getting there on foot is safer, for the moment, as the skycar is more likely to draw attention from the skytank. Of course, the skycar is faster. Another option for the heroes is simply to attempt to leave, this being someone else's fight. Of course, to get to their boats, they will have to deal first with the warlions on the beach.

Go on the Offensive: While the heroes and the guards are probably not equipped well enough to stand in a toe-to-toe fight with the warlion teams, they can still attempt to inflict damage against them. If the heroes in the group are especially skilled at dealing with opponents without using weapons, then the Gamemaster could provide more detailed information necessary to take the battle to the warlions. Remember, though, that this is a very dangerous option.

Setting traps, though time-consuming to build, might slow down the opposition. There are areas of the island where the foliage is dense enough that it might be possible to ambush one of the warlions from behind, killing him or knocking him out, taking his weapons afterward. This is extremely risky, however; if the other warlions in his team hear anything, they will respond quickly, and the heroes will be facing five

heavily armed opponents who have orders to eliminate everyone on the island.

Note that going on the offensive does not necessarily just involve combat. Assuming they have the right skills, Tech Op heroes could, for example, direct an electromagnetic jamming attack, rendering more difficult any Thuldan attempts at command-and-control. Diplomat or Free Agent heroes could attempt to deceive the warlions into heading off in the wrong direction or worse, cause them to split up. The warlions aren't incompetent troops, so the Gamemaster should feel free to add penalties to such attempts.

Call for Help: The heroes or Alan can try using comm units or other methods to call for help. If they try this within the first two rounds, they will not be able to get through, as the skytank was jamming (at Ordinary intensity) outgoing communications. Equally, any attempts to communicate through the Grid fail to get through as well; this is VORI's doing, and it will last for the duration of the adventure.

If the heroes manage to get in touch with anyone (possibly relayed from the resort they're vacationing at), it will be at least an hour before any help can arrive. They advise the heroes to find someplace to hide for that time.

If the Gamemaster does not wish to deal with tipping the scales in the adventure, he or she could decide that no help is forthcoming. This could be due to political pressure by the Thuldans to keep a lid on things, it could be that the Regency does not want to get involved in an internal Thuldan dispute, or it could be simply a case of bad timing.

Act III: Against All Odds

This act is a chaotic jumble of challenge and combat scenes that test how well heroes handle high-pressure situations when not totally prepared for them. The heroes must once again to rescue Artemus Vych from certain death and keep themselves alive to find out why people keep trying to kill him. The act reveals the secrets the Thuldan invaders already believed exposed, as the heroes' only avenue of escape may be through Outpost Nereid, the very place the Thuldans have come to destroy

The Beach: If the combat lingers on the beach, the Gamemaster must work to get the heroes to the manor by the end of this scene. Alan Quinn or the other security personnel can play a large role, providing enough cover for heroes to take a skycar from the hangar to the manor rather than take on the warlions without enough weapons. If things go really awry and the warlions sweep through the manor house killing the Vychs and anyone else they found inside, the heroes can board a boat and seek to leave the island, ending this adventure but leaving many loose ends for a Gamemaster's campaign. Look to the Epilogue for possible ways to follow up this adventure and satisfy players' curiosities.

Scene 1: On the Homefront

This scene is a combination of a combat scene and a challenge scene, depending on the timing and placement of characters. It is all contained within Vych Manor and involves a siege by Thuldan cleanup crews sent to silence all traitors to the Empire. Unless a hero came off with incredibly hostile reactions from Garond, he'll set aside reservations in this scene and ask for the heroes to help get Vych out of this alive.

The Gamemaster should count out the rounds since the Thuldan warlions landed at the end of the last act. This provides some time frames as to when the attacks on the manor arrive, as well as the internal time frames of other activities, all of which are noted below.

Interior Situations

There are nine security personnel, the four hospital staffers, a butler, and four maids within the manor, as well as any wounded heroes and characters, including the comatose Mrs. Vych. Wounded characters and the hospital staff are in the same places where Act I, Scene 2 left them, while the servants and security have moved about. The moment Garond informs them of the lockdown and imminent attacks, the manor staff moves up into the staff lounge (#M14) to minimize the area that security has to cover.

Regardless of the number of rounds since the start of the siege, Garond's nine security personnel take up positions around the inside of the manor, adjusting their positions only by his direct orders. There are two security guards at the bottom of the stairs (#M1), two flanking the top of the stairs (in front of #M10 and aside the stairwell), and one more each on the doors leading into the hospital (#M12). There are three more security personnel, one in the lounge (#M14) keeping any staff and recuperating heroes calm, while the other two are up on the third floor trying to open Garond's room and get at the additional armaments.

Jerry, Get Your Guns!

Garond and the heroes arrive at the front door of the manor either by skycar or on foot, the Thuldan warlions in hot pursuit. The round in which they arrive depends on the condition of their skycar. Assuming it wasn't shot down, they'll reach the manor at the beginning of Round 3. Otherwise, their round depends on their movement rates.

There is no cover at the front door unless the heroes bring the skycar in close and keep it between them and the warlions' line of sight. Even before they exit the craft, they may come under fire from approaching warlions dropped 200 meters to the west of the manor (see the section below). Regardless of casualties, Garond keeps moving for the manor, though he doesn't use his comm after ordering the lockdown.

Round 4/Entry +1: Assuming Garond, the skycar driver (another security guard), or any other personnel are not shot at the front doors, one of the security guards enters the security code to open the blast doors and the interior doors. Gamemasters should keep careful watch on the progress of the warlions to determine how close they are to the party. Once the doors are open, it only takes the remainder of that round to enter the manor.

Once Garond and his companions enter the building, he resets the blast doors. However, to do so takes an initiative check to see if he can lock down the manor before the Thuldan warlions get their round to attack. Even if they are more than 50 meters away, the warlions launch attacks at the open door while they can (and a frag grenade might be able to damage the door mechanisms, preventing lockdown).

Rounds 5–11/Entry +2 to +9: Garond's first move is to yell to his security that the heroes work with them, as "we're all now under a death sentence by the Empire, and we'll need all the help we can get to stay alive." Garond bounds up the stairs, not slowing for heroes, heading for his quarters (#M19) and the armory (#M19A). As they pass Level Two, he asks the heroes, "I'll need two of you to come with me to help with the weaponry we'll need. Can the rest of you stay here and see what we can do about moving the patients?" He doesn't wait for an answer, as he's used to his orders being followed, however phrased. Three rounds after they've entered the manor, Garond and two of the heroes are in his quarters, uniting with the two security guards there, and they all open the armory the round after that.

Garond provides the heroes with any weapons they can use, keeping the quantum and render rifles and sabot pistols for his two security guards to distribute to the guards on the stairs. In addition, each hero and security guard will get a CF battle jacket (treat as a CF longcoat). Garond himself grabs a chainsword, an autoflechette shotgun, an 11mm charge pistol, and CF softsuit. He inquires if anyone can use the grenade launcher, and if so, provides that hero with a half-dozen grenades and a request to take a position at the top of the stairs on the second floor

Once everyone is armed (two rounds at most, three if loading up grenade launcher & grenades), Garond locks up the armory and runs everyone back down to the hospital in one round. As they pass other security, they distribute the other rifles and Garond issues the order to shoot to kill.

Round 8: The warlions reach the manor after eight rounds at full sprint.

Round 9: The groups head for different areas of the manor exterior. Group A begins working on destroying the main door and Group B works on the window. In the event of delays at either location, a team might make for the servants' entrance as a backup.

Round 11: Group A reaches the main entrance and begins to force entry.

Round 12: Group B begins lobbing small sticky demolition charges (which stick to the windows) at the second floor window (#M13). The glass is actually dense crystalline matrix of Good toughness, resists damage like a CF softsuit, and has structural points of 9/9/4. Once Group B inflicts enough damage to open some holes (all stun and wound or 2+ mortals), any remaining warlions can launch grappling hooks at the window's edge, climb up the following round, and enter the solarium on the round after that.

Warlion Tactics

the skycar or characters on foot

with Garond to make his job easier or even coming up

blast doors are in place, roll d6+2 rounds to see how

through blast doors and other security defenses with a single check (Ordinary, –1 round; Good, –2 rounds; Amazing, –3 rounds)

Once warlions are in the building, their primary objective is the hospital and the assassination of Doctor Artemus Vych. After the primary objective of clearing the building of targets (the doctor first, hostiles second, staff third, and patients last), the warlions plan to set the satchel charges on support-bearing walls on the first and second floors to destroy the building.

The Doctor's Orders

Once Garond ordered the lockdown, Doctor Vych demanded to be placed in a hovercha

situation by the Chief. If any demolition charges have exploded outside the window, they'll cut short the plan and Doctor Vych & Garond both give the following orders and set these actions in place (if the heroes don't have better ideas):

- Dr. Vych orders his wife on a stasis stretcher, as well as anyone too injured to remain conscious (priority to his wife and daughter, if she survives, then others).
- The southern door to the hospital is shut and locked, and two security guards place themselves between the solarium and it. Any other security not on the stairs clusters around the elevator.
- Garond and any heroes he can talk into going with him take the elevator up to Vych's private lab to collect his research journals as bargaining chips (or as blackmail against his Thuidan political enemies). This takes at least three rounds, then the elevator arrives back at M20 to take everyone straight down to the outpost in three rounds (arriving six or more rounds after the first arrivals).
- All traffic out of the hospital routes through the lab, doctor's office and quarters, and collects around the elevator tube. Dr. Vych himself resets the elevator controls so they cannot be called to the ground floor.
- Doctor Vych, his wife, a nurse, and two heroes take the elevator down to the outpost the round after Garond goes up, and the tube takes two rounds to reach the outpost's top level. This leads directly into Scene 2, though the scene will be staggered for players as heroes may be split up into two groups.
- The third elevator down to the outpost holds a security guard, Dr. Graves, the two remaining nurses, and Ayla or another patient on a stasis stretcher. The remaining elevators will be filled with the servants and possibly retreating security forces.
- Garond gives a security guard or a hero the access code to move the elevator down to the Outpost, trusting that she'll see to the remaining staff's evacuation from the manor (if need be). Once the doctor is in the outpost, the Chief doesn't leave his side. For heroes who wish not to hold the fort, it will take approximately 20 rounds before all others are evacuated down to the outpost and they can either follow or destroy the elevator to prevent pursuit by warbots.

Scene 2: Beneath the Depths

This scene actually has two starting description boxes, as there's a good chance that the heroes may encounter this combat scene at different times. The box below describes the scene as encountered by the first group to enter the outpost. The "Late Arrivals" box provides more details for the heroes and Garond who arrive later loaded down with Vych's journals. Both scenes use the information and actions in the "Outpost Asunder" section.

The quick trip down here causes a blood rush to your head, and Dr. Vych cries out in pain then falls limply. The nurse directly behind him attaches an oxygen mask to his face and monitors him on his medical gauntlet. The doors open and you face a door directly opposite the elevator. The nurse moves to immediately get Dr. Vych out of the elevator along with his wife, and then stops, looking to you for some direction.

Once you enter the external chamber, you find another door northeast of the elevator, an open doorway leading south, and a spiral staircase directly west of the tube. There are some indistinct noises coming up from below via the staircase. No other sounds are audible, though the metal doors look formidable enough to block any sounds beyond them.

Awareness–*perception* checks allow the heroes to notice the following details around the elevator as it immediately closes behind them and rockets upward (one detail per check, despite multiple results in each):

Ordinary: The noises from the stairs are sustained weapons fire and some yells from a human victim. The door opposite the elevator is hot to the touch.

Good: There are scratches on the doors, showing some evidence of recent forced entry. There is a card key shoved into the bottom of the door access keypad; when pulled out, its markings reveal it as an override pass.

Amazing: There is a slight smell of ozone in the air, as if a charged weapon were recently fired. Slight layers of dust and no signs of any activity along the floor and walls show the southern doorway and hall to be relatively unused in some time.

If the heroes put some of these clues together, they'll know they have to find safe places for the doctor and his wife (not to mention themselves). If they move to the southern corridor within two rounds, they'll be safe for at least two rounds before being discovered. Any hesitation for more than two rounds leads to their abrupt discovery by a saboteur. Other reactions depend on which way they go, and the places and characters are covered after "Late Arrivals."

Late Arrivals

The elevator door opens and the acrid smells of charged weapons fire and ozone wash over you. They come from the sparks and arcing wreckage of a doorway directly opposite the elevator door. There is another door to its left that is intact, an open hallway to the right, and a spiral staircase leading down behind the elevator tube.

Garond immediately drops the books in his arms and brings his pistol to bear. "That room's the command post," he says, nodding his head toward the ruined door, "so we're compromised for sure. They must have come in from below. I'll check below for the doctor, and you folks check around up here. Shoot first and ask questions later. It's quite likely the staff's already dead." Garond nearly leaps down into the stairwell, quickly dropping out of sight. You're left looking at two different ways to go, if you ignore the ruined doorway and smoking room beyond it.

The description for heroes showing up later hinges on the activities of Saboteur A (see below). If the previous heroes or characters altered her course of action, adjust the descriptions accordingly.

This group of heroes can also make Awareness–*perception* checks with the same effects as the previous group, though no sounds drift up from the stairwell. If the first heroes went down the hallway and hid there, Amazing results might overhear the doctor's labored breathing in his oxygen mask or the delicate hum of his hoverchair or the stretcher.

Gamemasters should add the cue described in the boxed text below only if a hero makes an Awareness–*perception* check with a Good or better result and stands in earshot of the stairs when Garond leaps down them into the lower level of the outpost. Otherwise, they can participate in Scenes 2 or 3 oblivious as to what awaits them below.

Garond growls menacingly as he lands at the bottom of the stairs. Then a pair of shots echo slightly in the stairwell, followed by Garond's grunt and soft thud as he falls to the ground.

Outpost Asunder

The Thuldan Security Ministry has invaded the outpost with a secondary crew in addition to those above. The four-person team has begun the liquidation of staff and resources, though they have taken some casualties themselves. All of these saboteurs use the Amazing Spy template (with three satchel charges each). All satchel charges placed by saboteurs are synchronized and will blow 20 minutes after the first heroes' arrival.

When the first heroes arrive via elevator, Saboteur A has just finished setting a timed satchel charge above the door to N3 in addition to the one in the upper left corner of the room behind her. She'll cross N1 next round, ignoring the bodies of the technician and the guard in this room, using a charge pistol to further destroy the command post and monitors. Round 3 sees her open the external door and blast its lower seam to prevent it from closing. She then takes a right, goes directly to N4, and places another satchel charge on the computers monitoring the genepool in the lab. Once done with that (Round 6+), she and Saboteur B plan to use the southern corridor to reach the stairwell and make good their escape.

Saboteur B, a cyber-spy, downloads all the data from the outpost computer into dataslots inside his head. It will take him until Round 7 before he's finished downloading and storing the rest of the data, but he's ready to move by Round 8. The dead body of the senior technician lies beneath the gillman gestation tubes.

If hidden in the southern corridor, heroes will be discovered in Round 9 unless they block the lab door from opening. They might also have been discovered earlier if they entered the lab that way, though Saboteur B cannot disconnect from the computer and suffers a +2 step penalty to shoot at anyone entering the lab from the south.

Saboteur C was to hold the lower level, hold airlocks Alpha, Beta, and Gamma open wide, and move any usable equipment onto the sub. The airlocks are jammed open, so when the sub exits, the complex will flood. The sounds heard by the first heroes signal the attack of the cybermariner on this lone Thuldan. The battle takes three more rounds, damaging the doors of N6 and N7, and ends when the N5 guard station explodes under aqualaser fire. Saboteur C dies as his cover exploded around him. This is where he'll be found. Les Dybrol/VORL moves slowly through the outpost's lower level, and moves within 2 meters of the stairs when Garond leaps down them (leading into Scene 3).

Saboteur D is found dead of poison gas in N12, the one person to fall from the guard's actions by sealing this initial invader into the airlock. His charge pistol is missing (and in the hands of Les Dybrol/VORL's in Scene 3).

All saboteurs will shoot anyone who interrupts their work, especially since their orders are to kill anyone at the site. The primary combat of this scene takes place when the heroes and remaining security guards confront the saboteurs (or make a challenge of avoiding them and escaping with Vych). Finding all the satchel charges and disarming them is the secondary challenge of this scene. If the heroes trap the saboteurs in corners or try to capture them, Saboteur A and B are zealous enough to try and shoot the charges at N3, N4A, or the two each set at N4B and N4D (the comm array with Filtrane). If the charges at N4B or N4D are set off prematurely, they'll set off a cascading effect of overloading electrical systems and explosions that will destroy the outpost in d6+2 rounds.

Scene 3: Red Tide

This scene offers the heroes and Vych an escape from Thuldan retribution. However, there is still one enemy that remains at hand, and it has returned to finish the job that started this adventure. The heroes must get themselves and any victims out of the outpost. The heroes should use the mini-sub primarily for the wounded and those who simply cannot swim, and grab scuba equipment for everyone else. It will be dangerous, but if they manage to avoid or overcome Les Dybrol/VORL, they should make good their escape.

If the heroes have disabled the satchel charges (requiring a successful Demolitions check per device), there is not as much of a time constraint to keep moving. However, if the clock is ticking, the Gamemaster should keep a close eye on it and perhaps even running Scenes 2 and 3 in real time and keep the heroes at a frantic pace. If people are not in N15 or beyond by the end of the 30 minute timer, they need to make a successes on a Stamina–*endurance* check, with a +3 step penalty, just to survive the explosions and continue moving out.

The Arrival of the Cybermariner

The presence of another enemy complicates the escape. The Gamemaster and players could resolve this scene either by roleplaying or combat. Depending on when the heroes enter this level, heroes can enter a firefight or they can attempt to communicate with the cybernetic man.

If the heroes and Vych moved down the stairs upon arrival in Scene 2, they enter this level in Round Two of the battle between Saboteur C and VORL. Saboteur C stands by the doors to the guards' quarters, and he's surprised to see anyone come down the stairs. He keeps his gun trained on the cybermariner and shoots, scoring a small wound on the man's right side. Les Dybrol/VORL shifts his targets to a hero and Saboteur C and shoots simultaneously.

The scene as laid out below assumes the heroes don't penetrate the lower level until they've dealt with the saboteurs, though all it does is speed up.

At the bottom of the stairs, you find Garond, his chest and head scored by vicious laser and charged particle burns. The noise you made as you descended the metal stairs prevented a silent entry into the lower level, and you hear a ragged, partly electronic voice say, "You know of <Veezroarel>. Secrecy must be maintained." A figure approaches from across the shadowy room.

The pallid man stands before you again, his aqualaser rifle still in his left hand and a charge pistol in his right. He stares at you unemotionally, both gun barrels following the direction of his eyes, but he doesn't let his guard down. He

focuses on you, then on the person descending behind you, and so forth. The low flames from the ruined computer and monitor console grant an eerie orange glow to the cyborg.

Any hero who makes a successful Awareness–*perception* check finds that Garond is still alive by his shallow breathing (anyone trained in Knowledge–*first aid* or Medical Science–*treatment* who actually examines Garond also determines this). The sudden double attack knocked him out, leaving him with only his mortal points intact. Les Dybrol/VORL has ignored the prone body as it is more interested in checking over the equipment stored in N8 or any heroes and characters that may have entered the lower level.

The VORL AI learned of this outpost through its Grid invasion earlier and chose to find it to plunder its databanks as well as continue to eliminate anyone it thinks knows about it. If any explosions happen above, the AI knows it cannot gain any data here, and orders its cybermariner remote to return to extermination mode.

If more than three heroes and characters descend the stairwell at once, the AI holds its actions and waits for the entirety of the group to descend, though it keeps Dybrol's weapons trained on them at all times.

Heroes with Personality skills can attempt to talk to VORL. Heroes who succeed with Culture–*first encounter*, Interaction (especially *bargain*), or Leadership–*command* can open a dialogue with the AI through its mindless Nariac puppet. Amazing successes might even persuade it to disarm the satchel charges in order to infiltrate these computers and those on Filtrane (an option that Vych, if he makes a Good or better result on a Resolve–*physical resolve* check to regain consciousness), might offer up to a hero. They might also delay it enough and keep it talking, rather than firing its remote's weapons.

If the AI has a number of seemingly open minds to talk to, it rapidly fires off questions, hardly waiting for answers, such as "What do you know of VORL? Why did you invade my home? Where is the Michael Taron? Why did he invade my home and attack me?" The AI carefully watches all eye movements and pulse rates (via the carotid artery on the neck, if exposed) to determine lying. If lied to, it breaks off the dialogue and causes the cybermariner to fire at the hero, crying out "False data."

Once combat begins with VORL, it only retreats if deprived of one weapon or hit for more than two wounds in one round. In retreat, it turns its back on the heroes, refocusing its attacks on something else. Heroes who succeed in a Awareness–*perception* check see the sub at the end of the airlock channel, upon which the AI now trains its attacks. Unless the heroes prevent Les Dybrol/VORL from inflicting more than two successful hits on the sub's interior, it will be useless as an escape vehicle. In fact, if he gets more than 4 successful attacks on the sub, he punctures the hull and the sea floods in through it.

Escape

If the heroes survive their encounter with VORL and all else, Garond or Vych directs everyone toward the mini-sub, packing in as many as can fit by putting two people in gunner's chairs. It takes three rounds to move the hoverchair and stretcher(s) into the sub along with the people, another round to close the nose-airlock, and a final round to start the engines and maneuver back into N16 to exit via the tunnel. The tunnel is 1 kilometer long but relatively wide and straight. It takes successful Vehicle Operation–*water vehicle* checks to operate the sub. If no one among the heroes has any relevant skill, the Gamemaster may elect to allow one of the healthy technicians (or even security guards) to conveniently demonstrate knowledge of the skill at rank 1. Heroes must succeed at a Good complex skill check. One Failure causes the sub to hit the side of the tunnel, knocking out the comm system. A second Failure disables the bow steering planes, adding a further +2 step penalty to successive skill checks. The third impact damages the propeller, leaving the sub dead in the water.

Once the heroes exit the kilometer-long tunnel, they are free to take it toward the nearest safe port, which seems to be Yllam Resort. While Islvych may still have Thuldan troops on it, the quick arrival of Regency naval forces (called in as soon as the sub reaches the island) prevents any further immediate problems for the heroes.

Taking the Plunge

It is possible to swim out using the underwater equipment in N8. See the section on "Underwater Tech" for information on

The Deepfallen Cameos

heroes can show them a few deepfallen swimming the 1-kilometer long tunnel into the open sea. They humans inside it, but after two rounds, the trio of swim off.

Or, the Gamemaster could develop a floating scene outpost via N15 like the Thuldan guimen do). Having vat containing the deepfallen remains (which the deep fallen trio will want returned to them, of course).

the military style wetsuits and equipment. Even with such protective gear, humans are not capable of safely swimming at depths of 180 meters. It takes four successful Stamina–*endurance* or Resolve–*physical resolve* checks to make the trip, though they the heroes develop serious injuries from the bends (developed when a diver ascends too rapidly from higher pressure areas) after surfacing. As long as they get to the Yilliam resort infirmary (or any better medical facility) within an hour of escaping Islvych, they fully recover.

Continuing Chaos

If the Gamemaster wishes to continue the adventure, try throwing in more cyblue sharks. VORL wanted to send backup for the cybermariner remote, so these nasty critters lurk outside the tunnel entrance. These are fearsome enough a threat to those inside the mini-sub; anyone actually swimming out will have considerable additional problems!

Epilogue

This adventure keeps events moving along at a fast pace, preventing heroes from getting many answers about why they were embroiled in this affair in the first place. This may frustrate them. Dr. Vych provides some of the answers, but even he is baffled about Filtrane's decision to send a cleaner team to eradicate everyone at the installation. He certainly understands what they are trying to protect (the dead deepfallen in various stages of postmortem examination), but neither he nor Chief Garond have any clue about any security breach. The guy there at the end—who was he? He represents some new player, but who?

What Vych Knows

Dr. Vych is well aware that the Thuldan gillmen program underway at Outpost Nereid constituted a serious international issue. The Regency government, suspicious of Thuldan motives concerning the deepfallen, has done its best to prevent any contact between the two groups. Vych knows that if they discovered that the Thuldan gillmen project was undertaken at the cost of deepfallen lives, the Regency would go through the roof. Vych did not request that the deepfallen be killed to further his research and development, although he is aware that the Thuldan government on Aegis probably deliberately killed the last one. Previous specimens were too badly damaged to be of much use (the Thuldans had found them near the site of an underwater industrial explosion beneath Filtrane Island).

Vych was only vaguely aware of Michael Taron's interest in some recent discovery—something about a foreign AI or something. He wasn't paying much attention to Michael, but he is certain that it was a VoidCorp system. (Ayla, if conscious, can confirm this. She also hadn't a great interest in the topic, but she remembers warning Michael to leave it alone.) Given the events of the day, including the arrival of that strange cybermariner, he is sure that Michael stumbled onto something far more dangerous than he initially believed. He recommends handing this information over to the Regency, as they are better equipped to handle it. If the heroes want to sit on it for a while, he will agree to their request, but will not want to wait more than a week or so. He may be safe from the Thuldans for now, but if this AI found them once, it could do so again.

Act III and Beyond—Campaign Potentials

As only the Gamemaster and players know exactly how their campaign adapts each adventure, there are a number of ways to resolve the many unsolved mysteries of this adventure. The simplest is to follow up only on those that the heroes seek out themselves; any of the characters that were part of the campaign survive, others dying off camera as necessary (certainly possible for Gettys and Quinn if not others). For other options, see below.

Defection

Using this secret option, Gettys & Quinn become accomplices and CIB agents working undercover to try to help Doctor Artemus Vych secretly defect to the Concord. The final act illustrates the doctor's main reason for defecting: His enemies can wield so much power against him that his importance to the Empire no longer shields him from retribution. Thus, he chooses to trade his knowledge to the Regency or Concord in exchange for asylum.

Individual Endings

Each of the primary characters in this adventure may have further life in your campaigns, if they each survive what *Deep Cover* puts them through. While these all adjust as per how things played out in your game, these are the broad ideas on where the characters go next.

Artemus Vych will move his loyalties and his resources to the Concord. Given that many of his fellow Thuldans in power were so eager to destroy him and all of his work over a perceived information leak, by mid-2503 he'll go into hiding at Depth Epsilon. He'll begin producing a few gillfolk for the Concord and the Regency, making it easier for humanity and deepfallen to bridge the gaps between their worlds. Even if he doesn't survive, his journals can act as diplomatic bombs against Thuldan conspiracies.

Ayla and Mrs. Vych remain in hiding with Artemus and are believed dead, just as any staff who escaped from the Islvych siege must remain. The Regency helps move many of them into new identities and jobs elsewhere in the Verge, far away from any Thuldan holdings.

Alan Quinn continues as a CIB agent, and he could easily become an infrequent ally or friend of the heroes for a Gamemaster's home campaign. Chief Garond could also defect over to the Concord or the Regency, depending on how much of an impression the heroes or Alan Quinn left on him.

Gettys' fate is left to Gamemaster hands: Given the hostile forces shooting anything that moved, Gettys may have died in the surf off of Islvych, shot in the back by the lander's crew. If he survives this adventure, Gettys remains a black sheep among the Regency Ministry of Security . His complicity with the VORL AI can either continue to help him or bring about his end. He could make a good but untrustworthy source of information, a manipulative adventure source that forces heroes into immoral missions, or simply a blackguard and campaign villain whom everyone loves to hate.

Garond leaves the employ of Doctor Vych, as he'll have other bodyguards and Garond sees no need to limit himself to working for the Thuldans. He could become a solid acquaintance and ally of the heroes during a campaign. However, like many of the others from Islvych, he'll be moved to a different system and be given another name. If the Gamemaster wishes to retain Garond, he can become a CIB agent alongside Alan Quinn.

Ramifications on Aegis

This adventure revealed quite a few things in passing that heroes might see as localized problems. However, some of what they encountered has world- and system-wide impact.

In the broader game of Bluefall politics, the Regency and the Concord know what the Thuldans and the Nariacs are up to beneath the sea. However, none of the four powers involved can officially admit to knowing anything.

The Regency diplomats and scientists at Depth Epsilon are surprised that the deepfallen don't seem to be bothered in the least by the cybermariners or the mutant gillfolk. In fact, Tethys surmised the general deepfallen reaction thus: "We are willing to share the world with them, though they have much to learn about the ways of the sea." The deepfallen also show no anger at the discovery of their dead brother at Islvych (even if they did not show up at the end of the adventure, they were aware of his death). Tethys did express sadness at the loss, and some confusion as well: "If the people making these creatures wanted to know more about us, they could have asked. We have specialists who possess medical information on our anatomy and physiology. Surely this would be a better way."

Rumors fly about cybernetic gillmen and water-breathing mutants for months after the incident at Islvych (assuming that the heroes survive to discuss this with folks at the Yliam resort or elsewhere). Through careful false reports and media manipulation, the CIB and the Regency succeed in making another "hidden monster myth" on the level of the Loch Ness Monster. They choose this rather than have a full investigation of Thuldan and Nariac activities, which could easily engulf Bluefall and the Verge in a conflict that none can afford at this time.

Expanding the Adventure

If the Gamemaster or the players want to follow some of the stray clues and potentials scattered within the *Deep Cover* adventure, the clues and hidden plots are noted below with other details dispersed among the sidebars. While the heroes remain on hand for most of the activity, the track of the adventure hardly allows for much chance to look into the greater mystery about why everyone seems to want Doctor Artemus Vych dead. While not mandatory, the *Dataware* supplement may help more fully expand the AI villain at the heart of these plots.

Aqualaser Clues

Tracing these is a difficult but not impossible task. Heroes will have to succeed at an Amazing Investigate–*track* complex skill check. Depending on the parameters of the search, the heroes find information on two major purchases of aqualasers:

- Four years ago, an unregistered buyer made a mass purchase of one hundred cybernetic aqualasers from Orion merchants in the Stellar Ring. No record exists of the shipment's destination.
- Two years ago, a now-defunct laser distributor sold twenty-three blue-green laser pistols, twelve cybernetic lasers, and thirty inner-arm cyber-mountings to a Nariac quartermaster at Newlan City on Berilar. This one clue at least suggests the existence of the Nariac cybermarine corps, though their official excuse for the use of them is "sport fishing for our officers," which the Regency declines to challenge.

The Nariac Cybermariners

While much of the information on them exists in their sidebar, only the Gamemaster can formulate the true plans and potentials of this new weapon in the Nariac arsenal. Aside from a few notable canonical facts below, plots surrounding the Nariac cybermariners come only from each individual Gamemaster.

The Regency does not push the Nariac Domain leaders for full disclosure of information about the cybermariners as the Regency Intelligence Agency already knows about it. In exchange for a blind eye and a few restrictions on their activities (i.e. no approaching within 1000 km of Regency or Hughes or any of the Depth projects), Commodore Dodds agrees to do infrequent work for the Ministry of Security, which most often entails spying on Thuldan undersea activities.

Dodds and his outpost at Newlan City continue to produce more cybermariners, and project the completion of four more enlisted personnel by the start of 2503.

The VORL Network

The plans of an AI are usually far reaching and often unnoticed by most humans. VORL continues to pursue its primary function, which is control of the computer nets of the Aegis system, and through them most of the control systems established by the AeGrid's many users. One of its principal—albeit unwitting—agents in this endeavor is Donald Gettys. Like most arrogant humans, Gettys believed himself safe from the AI's manipulations, but VORL has already betrayed and outmaneuvered Gettys. Worse, VORL has left Gettys' involvement out in the open.

Once Gettys transmits the Islvych information onto the Aegrid to his RIA shadows, certain worm programs embed themselves onto that data via shadowlinks. When that data enters sensitive Regency databanks, the worm programs almost imperceptibly open up windows and backdoors into the systems. These expose many of the Regency's most sensitive systems to the AI's perusal and eventual control. The AI is hardly interested in taking command of the orbital defense platforms, but once it gains that capability, its VoidCorp superiors may make that decision for it.

This, of course, is information that both VORL and its VoidCorp masters will kill to protect, and that may force the Regency to act openly against VoidCorp in the Aegis system. The entire VoidCorp-Regency conflict offers a superb backdrop for an ongoing campaign, as agents work diligently against their opposite numbers, strike teams hit sensitive targets under cover of darkness, and the escalation of tensions draws others into this shadow war.

The Michael Taron Connection

The death of Michael Taron sparked this chain of events after his discovery of the VoidNet. However, if the Gamemaster chooses, Michael's death may or may not have happened. The handsome husband of Ayla Vych could easily have staged his death, as those who saw the bodies disappear with the sharks did not know him. While arrogant beyond compare, Michael manipulated politics, people, and the Grid as well as a deepfallen could swim. His innate talent to psionically link to computers led to his discovery of the VORL network.

If Gamemasters want to develop an absolutely Machiavellian villain with an ego the size of a small moon, allow Michael to work with VORL as long-term villains who seek to seize control of Bluefall and take the Regency away from Christopher Hale. In Michael's mind, he deserves so much more than a dusty old duchy in the Stellar Ring: He deserves a kingdom in the Verge with Bluefall as his throne.

Taron Revenge: The plot has the death of Michael Taron in the wreck of the *Adler's Pride*. As the heir to an old and established noble house of the Empire, Michael's death causes a firestorm of activity by the Thuldans as they pursue the best lead they have about his killer—some Nariac cyberfreak killed him! This sort of passion-filled conflict among superpowers could cause many problems on Bluefall and provide players many future adventures.

Achievements

The following are suggested rewards for heroes for the activities and potential outcomes of the adventure:

1 achievement point for saving the lives of Artemus and/or Ayla Vych (each time saved);

1 achievement point for uncovering the treason of Donald Gettys on the AeGrid (+1 point more for his capture);

1 achievement point for successfully avoiding the Thuldan death squads; and

3 achievement points for defeating the attack by the Thuldans.

As a bonus, award 1 achievement point if the heroes manage to complete the adventure and help maintain the delicate political status quo of Bluefall. In addition, *Chapter 8: Achievements* in the *Gamemaster Guide* gives some guidelines on distributing rewards to individual heroes based on roleplaying or heroic actions.

STAR*DRIVE ACCESSORY

SYSTEM GUIDE TO AEGIS

William W. Connors and Steven Schend

The Verge is a dangerous place. Piracy, corporate warfare, the bitter rivalries of stellar nations, and an implacable alien menace threaten dozens of worlds and billions of people. But at the heart of all this chaos is a troubled sanctuary: the Aegis system. Dominated by the beautiful water world of Bluefall, Aegis is a place where the great powers of human space marshal their forces against myriad theats. But ambitious nations and desperate factions covet this refuge, for it occupies the most important strategic site in the Verge. The Regency government maintains Bluefall's independence against a storm of challenges.

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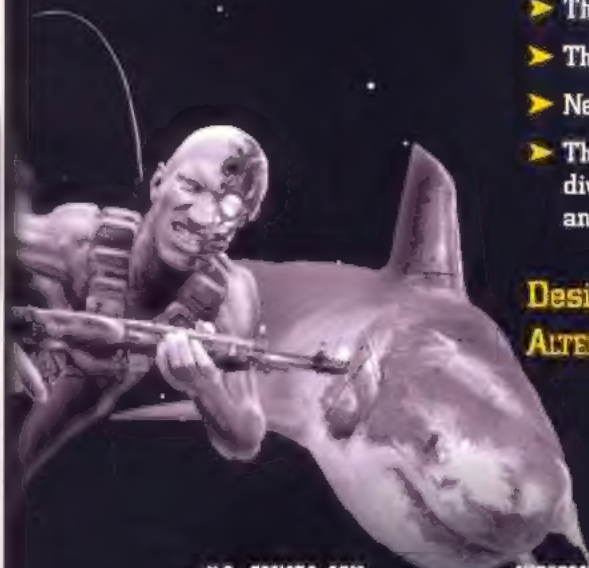

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